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ABSTRACT

This study examines ways in which the "child question" is a problem for contemporary sociology, and specifies concepts by which childhood might be understood as a modern social phenomenon. The study first examines insights of the feminist movement and academic feminism. Conceptual and methodological insights of feminist research, including insights that concern sexual politics, gender analysis, and the deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction of theoretical knowledge, are extended to the study of childhood. These insights are applied to a study of the organization of the everyday life of children living in one-parent households in four Nordic countries. The results of this study revealed three everyday life patterns for children: (1) a classical childhood, i.e., an extension of the modern childhood phenomenon in children's post-divorce situation; (2) a modern urban or suburban childhood which is predicated on social and cultural services for children; and (3) an innovative childhood that extends beyond the nuclear family. The study is designed to show the complexity in children's experience of the phenomenon of childhood. A 392-item bibliography is attached. (MM)

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MODERN CHILDHOOD? EXPLORING THE 'CHILD QUESTION' IN SOCIOLOGY

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EXPLORING THE 'CHILD QUESTION' IN SOCIOLOGY

Leena Alanen

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The study explores the 'child question' in sociology and aims to specify concepts by which childhood might be understood as a modern social phenomenon.

The exploration is conducted by way of examining what the feminist movement and, within social science, academic feminism, may offer as they have asserted the position of women in science. These are identified as critique, analysis of gender, deconstruction of conventional theoretical knowledge and, finally, its reconstruction by researching and rethinking the social world from new (gendered) standpoints.

The emerging interdisciplinary Childhood Studies is clearly motivated by dissatisfaction and criticism of existing childhood knowledge. Childhood is also beginning to appear as a topic for sociological study. Children, moreover, form and are increasingly treated as a social category with specific relations to other social categories and groups - a social 'class' with which various groups of more powerful 'others' maintain economic, political and cultural interests and social relations. These are now becoming visible; childhood has stopped being just a private family affair. Finally, the subjectivity and agency of children is becoming recognized.

The study investigates each of these developments as they appear in sociological literature on children and childhood and in empirical inquiry into the organization of everyday life of twenty-five children living in one-parent households. This exploration, conducted from a child perspective, or standpoint, reveals the active and constructive roles that children have in the making of their own everyday lives. Three different everyday life patterns, or childhoods, were found in the study: A 'classical' childhood that is an extension of the modern childhood phenomenon (Ariès) in children's post-divorce situation; a modern (sub)urban childhood that is predicated on the development of a child and youth market and an apparatus of social and cultural services for children and youth; and an innovative childhood that may be seen as an extension of the child's familial relations beyond the conventional boundaries of the nuclear family ('familiality').

The results not only describe the choices that children may make in terms of standpoints to knowledge. Such research, hopefully, also begins to show the many levels and the complexity in children's experience of the (historical) phenomenon of childhood and to validate the methodological significance of a children's standpoint in researching that experience.

Key words: childhood, sociology of family, feminist theory, socialization, social change

PREFACE

A sociological study of childhood was not on my mind when the diverse works that finally have lead to the present study were started. For reasons which are partly investigated in the following study, childhood has only recently figured as an object of sociological thinking. My first personal thoughts about childhood as a problematical state of being - when I venture to think back long enough and rely on my memories - were in connection with the experience of moving, in the 1950s, from one culturally constructed childhood (in North America) to another and very different one (in Finland). School life was different, children's games and plays were different, and so were the ways in which children related to other people, both adults and other children.

Childhood surfaced in scholarly discussions much later. One memorable instance was a discussion of radical sociology students, sometime in the beginning of the 1970s. The participants of that discussion would question any conventional notion of sociality except that of childhood. My own comments in that discussion expressed the view that there is little which is unquestionably pleasant in a child's experience of childhood. I expected others to agree and, moreover, to expand their (our) critical analysis of society by including childhood in it. This, however, did not take place; childhood was then not a concern of radical (or other) sociologist. My personal reaction was astonishment - was not, for instance, Philippe Ariès's *Centuries of Childhood* generally known?

Participation in a research project on Finnish families, lead by Professor *Martti Takala* at the University of Jyväskylä in the late 1970s, offered the first opportunity towards beginning to think about children and childhood within a sociological frame. Feminism provided the second challenge, although this was to be a longer story. My first meeting with academic feminism was while I was working in the family project and simultaneously studying for a degree in education at the University of Joensuu. My professor in education, *Annika Takala*, once handed me her own copy of a Norwegian scientific journal which contained an introduction to Women's Studies, assuming that it would be of interest. I had read books written by feminists earlier but here feminism was introduced as a question of science, as a view point to be taken seriously, and applicable also to those issues that I had been studying - family, everyday life and children.

Academic feminism entered Finnish universities at the beginning of the 1980s and this is the community in which some of the basic ideas of my dissertation were

born, tried out and developed. Among my feminist friends and colleagues at the university and in feminist politics, I want to thank especially *Aino Saarinen*, *Pirkko-Liisa Rauhala* and *Leena Laine* for their sustained support for my conviction that childhood is, also, a feminist issue. *Frigga Haug* (Berlin and Hamburg) has been, through her own imaginative research on women's socialization, a continuous inspiration, as well as a link to the international feminist research community.

The international project "Childhood as a Social Phenomenon" in which I have participated for the past five years has been for me the final guarantee as to the significance and timeliness of addressing childhood within sociology. My colleague, and research partner, *Marjatta Bardy* has been a constant support during the project, a receptive and critical reader of my texts and a very good friend. The other members of the international project team, from altogether 18 countries, are too numerous to be mentioned here. Special thanks are due to the leader of the project, *Jens Qvortrup*, from the University Centre of South Jutland (Denmark), for encouraging me to focus on the connections between women and children as well as between feminist analysis and the study of childhood, and to include my own contribution to these themes in the book with which the project completed its work. The present dissertation is a continuation of that work.

Participation in the international project "One-Parent Families in the Nordic Countries", during the past five years, has provided me with an arena for discussing and an empirical ground for developing a sociological analysis of childhood. *Raija Savolainen* has been my invaluable partner and diligent assistant during most of the project. Many thanks to her for also sharing her own experiences both as a student of sociology and as a single mother. Her contribution was made possible by a grant from the *Alli Paasikivi Foundation*.

My thanks also go Dr. *Margaret O'Brien* (University of East London) and Professor *Mirja Tolkki-Nikkonen* (University of Tampere), for the comments they gave me on the final version of the study, as well as to Professor *Marjatta Marin* (University of Jyväskylä), who during many years has followed closely my research, given me her views on it and, also, gently pushed me towards bringing it to a conclusion. My thanks also to Dr. *Sauli Takala* and *David Marsh*, for checking the text for its language and readability, as well as to *Minna Jokinen*, for processing the text for its final publication.

The studies on which my dissertation are based have been conducted while I have been at the Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä. I am grateful for the stable and supportive research environment that the Institute has provided during these years as well as for accepting my dissertation to be published

in the Institute's publication series. My friends and colleagues at the Institute, most of all *Marjatta Saarnivaara*, *Marjatta Tarmo* and *Hannu Jalkanen*, often found themselves having to listen to my (sometimes fierce) locutions on the significance of "a child's point of view" in educational research as well as in political practice. To my pleasure, they often were also kind enough to join in and elaborate on such themes with me. I finally want to thank them for their support.

Jyväskylä, in October 1992

Leena Alanen

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INTRODUCTION

1. The 'child question'

Since the beginning of the 1980s a growing number of sociologists have maintained that their discipline is flawed on issues about children and childhood: children are not treated within sociological knowledge; they are not studied in empirical sociology as are other social groups and categories; dictionaries and encyclopedias of sociology do not include children and childhood as entries; statistical and other general information on national or global populations are collected in which children do not qualify as relevant units; sociological knowledge is based on data that concern the actions and experiences of adults but not of children; textbooks do not present children as a topic for sociological inquiry; there exists no sectional specialism within the discipline that would focus on children or childhood; sociological discourses bypass childhood, and social theory continues to be written in which everyone is presumed to be an adult (e.g. Jenks 1982; Qvortrup 1985; Fürstenberg 1985; Ambert 1986; Flax 1987; Thorne 1987; Sgritta & Saporiti 1989; Burman, S. 1990; Qvortrup 1990b).

A summary of this criticism is to say that sociology is ignorant, negligent, even discriminating and repressive towards children or, in other words, it has a 'child question' to solve. The aim of the present study is to specify in what ways childhood is a problem for contemporary sociology and, based on this, to discuss and to develop possible ways of dealing with the problem.

To argue the 'child question' in sociology is not to say that sociologists have not spoken and written about children or childhood; they have, although - as will become

evident - such issues have been secondary for the discipline. The problem seems therefore to be generated more by the particular ways of speaking and writing and by the consequences of such ways for sociology as a social practice, as well as for specific knowledge. The 'child question' in sociology in this case is then fundamentally about the frames and concepts of childhood that have been used when sociologists have collected and analyzed data and then written and spoken about children.

The identification of the allegedly negligent, unequal, and discriminating treatment of children and childhood in sociology as the 'child question' is not an accidental choice of words: on the contrary, it establishes a deliberate link between the issue of childhood and various other topics that have become presented in the form of public issues and as such also made into an issue for the social sciences. The 'woman question' is a recent example of such an issue. In the beginning of the 1970s, feminists made the general observation that women and women's issues were, to a large extent, excluded from both the theoretical and the empirical subject matter of social science despite prevailing beliefs and pretensions of objectivity. This was clearly inconsistent. By bringing to general awareness this inconsistency - which, moreover, was observed to be conducive to the continuance of gender inequality in society - and by demanding that it be redressed, feminists have continually posed "the 'woman question' in science" (Harding 1986a; 1987a; 1991).

The 'woman question' was not being raised in public for the first time: it had already a history. The question had already been formulated into a political and social issue by many centuries of women contesting their situation of inequality, discrimination and oppression (Rossi 1974; Harding 1986a; Kandal 1988). But it was only in the 1970s that the issue was brought inside academic institutions, by the force of the second wave of the women's movement. This was the time when women (in the industrialized West) were entering universities in greater numbers than ever before, many of them with both a new social consciousness and political analysis of women's oppression as a sex. With this analysis in mind it soon became obvious that equality

did not prevail in academic life, in its institutions and its knowledge. Sexism - the unequal treatment of people that is based on their sex - existed even here. The posing of the 'woman question in science' marked the political identification and opposition to this situation; the multidisciplinary scholarship of Women's Studies that soon emerged was a practical response to the discrimination of women and women's issues within science, aimed at reconstituting the institution and knowledge.

This was, in itself, neither new nor radical. Critiques of old scholarship and attempts to construct new disciplines have appeared before (Gordon, L. 1991, 73). Other publicly voiced issues, besides the 'woman question', have been brought to bear on the claims of science. The body of classical sociological theory was in fact formed and developed as a response to the economic, social and political as well as intellectual changes that arose with or from industrialization, bourgeois revolutions and the Enlightenment (Giddens 1982; Touraine 1986, 19; Kandal 1989). Public issues concerning the emerging 'modern' social order have thus been fundamental to the body of knowledge that makes modern sociology.

This body of knowledge has, moreover, been questioned all the way from its very beginning. Karl Marx, one of sociology's 'founding fathers', was a vehement critic of the assumed impartiality and objectivity of the social science theory of his own time. By criticizing it for its failures to include the essential social (class) relations of capitalism in its analytic approaches he argued the 'class question' in sociological theory. His was also a thorough analysis of the oppressive relationship of one social class by another - a relationship that was inherent in the capitalist mode of production. He, moreover, brought to analysis the social processes beneath ostensive and dominant conceptual frames and revealed their underlying practices in terms of their historical specificity and structural manifestations, thus establishing a critical, materialist methodology for the social sciences (Harvey 1990, 3). - Since Marx, the 'class question' has remained one of the central issues of sociological theory.

The critical tradition has continued after the 'class question' and the 'woman question' were introduced and established as theoretically important and practically relevant issues in the social sciences. It has been carried on by such groups as coloured people, sexual and ethnic minorities, as well as peoples of the Third World. They, too, have criticized the social sciences for gaps and distortions that lead to inadequate understanding and conceptualization of race and ethnicity as well as of the relations between the First World and the Third World (Krüger 1987; Albrow 1990; Harvey 1990; Nicholson 1990). Discussions on these issues have expanded and they have generated new sections of critical investigation - Black Studies, Gay Studies, Race and Ethnic Studies, Third World Studies - in an effort to amend the state of existing knowledge.

To now place the 'child question' into this tradition of critical questions and analysis means to argue that at present children, too, constitute a social group that is done 'wrong' within and by the social sciences. It implies criticism of the existing body of childhood knowledge and the understanding of children's lives, interests and experiences as well as their place and significance in the working of society. And it also leads to the demand that fresh and critical inquiry is necessary in terms of society and social knowledge from the point of this particular group.

Some objections to such an attitude may at this point easily be raised. Perhaps the most obvious one stems from the opinion that children, contrary to women, the working class or any other social group, are not observed to constitute a social movement that has made claims on knowledge concerning themselves. They neither form an active, vocal population that voices its dissatisfaction with the prevailing public or scientifically produced view of their own condition, nor are they observed to present oppositional evidence of another 'reality', namely their own. It may, moreover, be strongly argued, based on developmental knowledge, that children could not even have the necessary cognitive capacities for raising their voice on such matters. In any case, children are in this sense different from other social groups who have already won social and political recognition for their case.

In relation to this, a counter-argument may be suggested that does not accept justification for a 'natural' difference between adults and children. Perhaps the working class, women as a social category and racial and ethnic communities - but not children - have managed to win public recognition to their cases only because they are socially recognized sections of the adult population, although even that recognition has only been won after struggles against earlier hegemonic definitions. The children's fault is not then in their undeveloped capacities - at least not in the first place - but in the present social nature of childhood: they are not allowed, or heard, or seen to make their case precisely because they are conceived of as beings not entitled, capable or willing to make a case. They do not have formal avenues at their disposal (e.g. institutions) that they would have shaped to represent their views (Burman, S. 1990). In other words, the argument in terms of 'difference' tends to naturalize childhood; it does not conceive of childhood as a historical and socially constructed phenomenon. Rather it takes for granted one or another definition of childhood that does not allow children to appear as social actors in the way that all kinds of adults are seen to appear. The suggestion is, furthermore, that in their definition of childhood as a natural, and not a social condition, contemporary hegemonic social groups follow the definitions that their predecessors issued on women, 'savages' and the 'primitive' and 'wild' (Gstettner 1981, 13-15; Jenks 1982, 10-11; Richter 1987, 25-29). For the children's voice to be heard and understood and their case advanced - whatever that would be - they would therefore need the hegemonic adult groups to question their own constructions of childhood.

Public discussion of childhood issues, particularly since the beginning of 1980s, has evolved in a direction that hints at this kind of child advocacy. Childhood and children have become a public issue in a manner not experienced before. Books and articles about children's conditions have appeared in abundance and one whole year (1979: the International Year of the Child) was devoted by the UN to concerns about children. The mass media increasingly communicates, for purposes of public

discussion, information on present circumstances and risks of childhood; they also report on new, emerging threats to child life (e.g. Hengst 1981; Suransky 1982; Melzer & Sünker 1989). The rights that children should be entitled to are also under extensive discussion.

The recent concern is the result, at least in part, of increasing observations on social changes concerning children's lives. A whole range of 'new realities and aspects' of childhood (Geulen 1989) has caught the public's attention. Among these are seen the decreasing significance of traditional institutions of childhood such as the family and the school in relation to other agencies, such as child and youth services, media, and peer groups (Preuss-Lausitz & Rülcker & Zeiher 1990). In addition, the families into which children are born do not remain unchanged either, most importantly as a result of the increasing rates of parental divorce and remarriage. This, moreover, has brought forth a new concern for children's interests (Théry 1988, 1989; Melzer & Sünker 1989). The increasing globalization of economic markets and communications is seen to contribute to an 'internationalization' of childhood in the sense that children now have wider access than earlier to other cultures and different lifestyles. What consequence this process might have for child life is not yet known (Chisholm et al. 1990, 1-2).

The discussion has in any case contributed to a new public mode of speaking about children: they are treated (at least in discourse) as a social category that is unified in a number of respects: their living conditions are changing, they are entitled to rights due to their common status as children, they are confronted with the same influences and they face some recently acknowledged risks, like poverty or abuse, in their everyday life etc. Childhood is thus perceived as more homogeneous than it used to be; national, regional and class differences between children are considered to be fading.

2. Rethinking childhood

Since the beginning of the 1980s, social scientists have also started to focus on children's lives, their living conditions and other child-related issues (for reviews see e.g. Hengst 1985; Böth 1987; Honig 1988; Chisholm et al. 1990). Publicly expressed concerns about children's fast changing life conditions and their imaginable social consequences have partly fuelled this interest. Another inspiration has been the work of Philippe Ariès, a French social historian whose *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* is generally credited as having pioneered the subdiscipline called the history of childhood. The book was originally published in 1960 and has since then been translated into several languages. The central claim in this social history of French family life is that childhood is not a natural phenomenon, but a thoroughly time- and context-bound 'invention' of modernity. The idea of childhood, i.e. an awareness of the particular nature of childhood that makes the child different from the adult, he argued, did not yet exist in medieval society in which the child, as soon as s/he could live without the constant solicitude of his/her mother or care-taker, belonged to adult society (Ariès 1962, 128). This belonging manifested itself in dress, games, pastimes, work and social life. - In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a new and different kind of awareness of the child's nature began to emerge, first among the professional and property owning sections. At this point children were understood to need a separate social world surrounding them. Such a world also emerged: first in the form of the intimate, child-centred family, and later in the development of public schooling.

Ariès's book, with its new message on the historicity of childhood, was long ignored among professional historians and only slightly more attention was given to it by demographers and sociologists (Finkelstein 1979; Vann 1982; Morel 1989; Niestroj 1989). It first started to receive steadily increasing interest at the end of the 1960s and this has continued since then (Vann 1982, 283-284). By now childhood has also been established as a serious topic for historical research as well as in closely related

disciplines such as anthropology (La Fontaine 1986), ethnology (Köstlin & Pohl-Weber & Alsheimer 1987) and ethnography (Berentzen 1989). Descriptive studies of national, class, ethnic, and urban and rural childhoods, in addition to childhood in different times, etc. have followed (e.g. Crubellier 1979; Humphries 1981; Walvin 1982; Aronsson & Cederblad & Dahl & Ohlsson & Sandin 1984; Hawes & Hiner 1985; Parr 1987; Shahar 1990; Burman & Reynolds 1990), demonstrating the variety of conditions in which children both have lived and continue to live.

Ariès's analysis of the birth of modern childhood has received its fair share of criticism from fellow historians (see e.g. Müller 1979; Wilson 1980; Vann 1982) and its main argument has been confronted with other evidence from the same period (e.g. Pollock 1983; Johansson 1987). Still, despite any of its limitations in terms of time and geographical scope, historical method or actual results, the book retains a lasting significance because of its novel depiction of childhood as a cultural phenomenon that is in no simple way related to childhood as a 'natural' condition.

Meanwhile the insight that childhood is historically and socially 'created' has motivated research that is also sociologically relevant, e.g. on the images, models or representations of the child as they have appeared in Western culture (e.g. Kuhn 1982; Lenzen 1985; Cleverley & Phillips 1986; Richter 1987; Jordanova 1989; Hendrick 1990). Such images may be assumed to have influenced, in one way or another, the life of 'real' children. Moreover, as institutions of science are part of the cultural apparatus, social scientific knowledge that has also been generated by and within these institutions in the form of 'facts' and concepts of childhood has been used in the cultural construction of childhood. These, too, have become the focus of studies (e.g. Gstettner 1981; Kessel & Siegel 1983; Smuts & Hagen 1985; Woodhead 1990).

William Kessen (1979), for example, discusses psychologists' construction of the child and its implications for the discipline. His basic argument includes the proposition that 'the child', as the whole endeavour of child psychology, is a 'cultural invention'. The usually unspoken conviction is that here is a 'real' child, susceptible

to discovery, behind all the surface variation. Different human cultures have invented different children, and psychology, in its definitions of the child, has been "moved with the same winds that blow the definition of the child". It, too, is influenced by commitments and changes in the wider culture. What the discipline needs is, therefore, "a careful, thoughtful analysis of what the cultural biases are and how they have their effect on children and on child psychologists", leading to "constant and floating reconstruction" of child psychology's object of study.¹ This object, Kessen contends, cannot be the 'true' child (or a particular researcher's conception of the true child); rather it becomes the changing diversity of children (Kessen 1983, 26-38).

Arlene Skolnick (1975, 1976), too, is concerned about the concept of childhood as it is used in research on child development and in social policies concerning children. Psychology shares with modern Western society, a profoundly ambivalent approach to children. There is, on the one hand, a rhetoric of concern for children, indicated for example by the popular beliefs that ours is a "century of the child" and that we live in child-friendly societies. Yet there is much evidence for a completely different reality of childhood, of the neglect and subordination which is obscured by the rhetoric of child-centredness. Psychology, she argues (Skolnick 1975, 41), has since the nineteenth century contributed to the "revolution of the child" and to the creation of the child-centred society.² This has been in terms of articulating a new view of the child as a sensitive being with special needs, powerful emotions and complicated thought processes. This contribution, she adds, also has had another side: by emphasizing the contrast between childhood and adulthood and 'pathologizing' the former, psychological research and theory has in fact promoted the rationale of

¹ Kessen compares such a review and revision with an image of trying to rebuild a ship while it is already sailing at sea. The only way to manage such "constant floating reconstruction", according to him, is to have some place on which to stand - some basic unchanging commitment (Kessen 1983, 33). This, of course, means that a discipline's basic commitments are constantly reflected upon.

² The prevailing assumption here is that research on children can only be imagined as serving the best interest of the child (Skolnick 1975, 41).

children's incompetence and dependency. This has, in turn, influenced subsequent research as well as childhood policy-making: the socially considered ambivalence towards childhood has been maintained, and children's everyday reality has been prevented from becoming visible.

Such basic assumptions within research and policy need to be unravelled. Skolnick (1975) herself begins to do this by surveying the images of childhood that have been carried over to the developmental paradigm of child psychology, and analyzing their biases. She takes the well-documented phenomenon of adolescence as a parallel, relying on Ariès's argument of the 'discovery' of childhood.³ If adolescence is accepted as a socially constructed stage of life, then this rationale must equally apply to the years between infancy and adolescence. Modern childhood can therefore be understood as resulting from a process of social construction - a process that is a part of the more general process of modernization (Skolnick 1975, 43-71).

The new vision of childhood that follows from this calls for rethinking psychology's developmental paradigms, and in her introduction to a book, published a year later (1976), Skolnick turns to students of child psychology and invites them to reconsider the concept of childhood, in other words, to consider a familiar subject in unfamiliar ways. Much of what they have thought of as obvious, natural and universal about childhood may actually be problematic, arbitrary and shaped by historical and cultural conditions. Without recognizing this, the major source of our knowledge of childhood (i.e. developmental psychology) provides limited and incomplete views of children and their development (Skolnick 1976, 1). For psychologists she suggests a move toward a more social view of childhood development that would interpret the progression of stages found in contemporary middle-class Western society as only one possible path human development could take, not the natural, inevitable, or superior one (ibid, 14).

³ Skolnick writes about the 'discovery', and not 'invention', of childhood. Here she refers to the first English translation (by Robert Baldick, 1962).

3. Children and childhood in sociology

These messages, promoted by Ariès and heard in a widening range of disciplines, should have also featured in the interests and work of sociologists. Curiously, however, in the social sciences and particularly in sociology, Ariès's influence has been minimal; it has appeared later and has been less significant than in other fields. Professional sociologists have so far made little use of his argument and when they have, they have mainly made limited references to the "discovery of childhood" in their introductions to culturally varying methods of child-rearing. Richard T. Vann (1982, 283), for instance, writes (somewhat derogatorily) that "by 1968, writers of sociological textbooks were writing their potted-history introductory sections with heavy reliance on Ariès".⁴ Sociologists have shown minimal readiness to accept childhood as a social construct within sociological analysis (Hood-Williams 1990, 157).

At present, instead of consensus, diffuseness, ambiguity and paradoxes prevails over the issue of childhood in sociology (Jenks 1982, 9-10). In an introduction to a book, titled *The Sociology of Childhood*, Chris Jenks wrote in 1982 of "unstated modes of theorizing", "implicit theories", "taken-for-granted assumptions" and generally of "the stenosis of dominant archetypes" in sociologists' treatment of childhood. Michael-Sebastian Honig (1988) recently surveyed the German research literature and noted that, although the works of Ariès and others (e.g. deMause 1974) have had the effect that the concepts of the child and childhood have been historized, their sociologization has not yet been accomplished (Honig 1988, 170).

As a matter of fact, should there be any hints at agreement among sociologists, they would still have to be on the relative **irrelevance** of childhood for and within the discipline. This much can be concluded from Anne-Marie Ambert's (1986) content

⁴ In contrast to this Shulamith Firestone, a radical writer in the second wave of feminism, bases one of the chapters ("Down with childhood") in her book from 1979 on a reading of Ariès and uses this reading for linking together the social condition of childhood with the oppression of women.

analysis of four sources of sociological knowledge up to the middle of the 1980s, as to the place that is given to children in sociological writing. She first surveyed the major works of theorists regarded as the founders of sociology and then looked at a number of recent sociology textbooks and sociological journals, as well as such textbooks as have been written with a special focus on childhood.

From her analysis of sociology's 'classics', Ambert concludes that none had much to say about children (Ambert 1986, 15-16). Out of the nine theorists that she included in her analysis - Comte, Marx, Pareto, Durkheim, Simmel, Weber, Mead, Parsons, Merton - only two discussed children at some length and both restricted their main discussion to one book each. Durkheim did this in a monograph on moral education⁵ and Parsons' in a theoretical treatise on the family as a subsystem of society⁶.

To understand why sociology's classics have had quantitatively little to say about children, Ambert refers to the macrosociological perspectives by which the discipline emerged. In such global presentations of social systems, children appeared, as in the case of women, as peripheral beings. Alternatively, they were depicted as future replacements for their adult members - necessary, of course, as such, but not significant from the point of view of on-going social life.

Jens Qvortrup (1985) offers a similar explanation for the lack of scholarly attention on children in both classical sociological texts and in later developments. Sociology originated, he writes, with nascent industrialism and from its beginning evolved predominantly around the world of work. This work-centeredness has remained its core. In the 'modern' family that accompanied industrialization, a division of labour evolved that demanded only the husband as a worker. An ideology of domesticity

⁵ *L'éducation morale* is a collection of Durkheim's lectures and articles that was compiled and published posthumously (1923) by his pupils; its English translation (also in Ambert's survey) is titled *Moral education* and published by The Free Press, New York (1961).

⁶ Parsons, Talcott & Bales, R.F.: *Family, socialization and interaction system*. The Free Press, Glencoe 1955.

emerged that supported this arrangement and held, moreover, that children were also to be kept outside the public world of work and confined to the family (and, from a due age, to school). Because women were (not supposed to be) gainfully employed, they were not seen to 'work', and without such a link to social life they also fell outside the central concerns of sociology. Children's even more taken-for-granted confinement to the privacy of the family, outside the serious world of work, functioned in a similar manner and caused children to be excluded from the sociological agenda.⁷

It may be that sociologists of the first period have based their agendas on their own everyday experience of white, European and (mostly) middle-class men in whose lives family, women and children had their 'proper place' as suggested by Ambert.⁸ She refers here to biographies of the founding sociologists which describe how their domestic lives were supervised by their wives, often aided by servants, and how they were only peripherally involved with down-to-earth matters of household and family life. Matrimony and paternity were simply natural facts mediated by a spouse, with or without a household staff, and not important issues to analyze (Ambert 1986, 23).

It may well be that these men adopted the scientifically assured common sense about childhood that prevailed at that time. In terms of both historical origin and contemporary status psychology is the "first science of childhood". It is also commonly taken as the principal source for scientific knowledge of the child by researchers and professionals as well as 'ordinary people'. By the time sociology entered academia, childhood was already by then firmly psychologized and pedagogized (Lenzen 1985; Honig 1988; Hendrick 1990) and an extensive literature on child-rearing distributed

⁷ To end this neglect Qvortrup argues for a revision of the concept of 'work'. By treating the labour of children in schools as serious work, children, too, would be seen as partners in the division of social labour. This, in turn, would mean that they also have a place in sociology (Qvortrup 1985; 1987).

⁸ Durkheim, for instance, is told to have been removed from "every material care and all frivolity" by his wife who, for his sake, also took charge of the education of their two children, thereby creating for him "the respectable and quiet familial existence which he considered the best guarantee of morality and of life" (Lukes 1973, 650).

notions of the child among the literate populace, if not yet among the general public. Peter Gstettner (1981) has looked at the evolution of these notions and argues that the child was originally discovered as an object of scientific study, analogous to those unknown territories and "primitive" and "uncivilized" peoples, which were viewed as inviting conquest and colonisation (see also Walkerdine 1984, 170-171). For scientists, this translated into research on the child in order to help making him/her civilized. - This is, intrinsically, where psychology, according to him, derives its notion of the child as an incomplete creature and a defective being.

Dieter Richter (1987), also, finds that a notable similarity existed between the increasing attention given to children and the status of childhood in the beginning of the modern period and the historically earlier confrontation of Europeans with strange cultures and "wild" aborigines. Images of childhood were constructed out of the experience of living with "strangers in one's own country". Measured against behavioural standards deemed to be appropriate to the adult, children increasingly appeared as uncivilized - as "little wild beings". Through the institutionalization of the family, and later the school, as the proper setting for the child population, society attempted to cure the ever stronger felt difference between adults and children. This image of childhood was, furthermore, carried over to the pedagogical movement of the 18th and 19th centuries and partly responsible for its gigantic vision of enlightenment and social progress: everything that humanity aims at could be tried out on children. Their capability to learn was limitless, they were like wax in the hand of their creator. Thus what caught the educator's interest in these creatures was not their significance as such, their lives and experiences, but the fact that they could be transformed, purified and ennobled (Richter 1987, 26).

This understanding of the time appears also in Durkheim's writing. In an article on childhood he states that childhood is essentially "the period of growth, that is to say, the period in which the individual, in both the physical and moral sense, does not yet exist, the period in which he is made, develops and is formed". The child "grows

because he is incomplete, ..., because there is still something he lacks" and, therefore, until he outgrows childhood he remains "a becoming" (Durkheim 1979 [1911], 150).

Such a notion of the child as "human raw material", to be moulded and civilized into an adult, also exists in the writings of later sociologists. Few of them have, however, expressed this as explicitly as Kingsley Davis (1940) in an article on the 'child-and-society problem'. The article begins directly by stating that "an individual's most important functions for society are performed when he is fully adult, not when he is immature. Hence society's treatment of the child is chiefly preparatory and the evaluation of him mainly anticipatory (like a savings account). Any doctrine which views the child's needs as paramount, and those of organized society as secondary is a sociological anomaly" (Davis 1940, 217). The corollary of this view is, as Qvortrup (1987, 4; 1990, 10) notes, that children are not regarded as historical subjects or active agents in society.

Societies, of course, need new "raw material" for their own continuity and renewal; in this sense children are a fundamental necessity for every society. The societal need of children, as well as the response to the need - the confronting of "a constant stream of raw material in the form of new babies" (Davis 1940, 217), or the 'production' and maintenance of children and, consequently, the existence of the social category of children in society - are undeniably a social fact which inevitably lies in the province of sociological thinking. According to Davis these social facts exist in the form of a problem, or a task, for society, which is to "process and distribute children so that the variegated system of interlocking adult statuses will be filled and the business of society thus accomplished". This 'fabrication' of the child for future specialized statuses requires that the child's socialization is started 'at the earliest possible' moment, and because of this the child must be initially placed in the social structure. This is done by ascribing him/her statuses according to his sex, age, age relations and kinship, and these statuses, in turn, lay the framework within which the society's cultural heritage can be transmitted. The statuses determine the goals (e.g.

adult statuses) towards which his/her training shall aim and the initial persons who shall carry it out. Thus, according to Davis (ibenda, 222-223), when "we know the child's sex, age, age relations, and the class, religion, region, community, and nationality of his parents, we know fairly well what his socialization - indeed, his life - will be".

Davis's account is cast in a functionalist frame, but brings forth the general standpoint from which sociologists have approached the problem that childhood presents for society - the "barbarians' problem" as it appeared to Parsons when he theorized about the social system at the beginning of the 1950s (see Qvortrup 1987, 4). And the most common sociological concept for dealing with such a problem has been a notion of reproduction. Reproduction has long been a respectable object for sociological theorizing and the notion is in frequent use in several fields of sociology. And when the notion has appeared too abstract for bringing to mind the fact that children are being born and grow up, a number of other concepts have been deployed, such as transmission (of skills, values, culture etc.) or enculturation. The most common notion, also used by Davis, for dealing with the problem of childhood is 'socialization'.

This becomes evident only by looking at textbook presentations of the sociological field. Ambert (1986, 16-17) finds in her survey of contemporary (North American) sociology textbooks that they generally include one chapter of children and childhood, even if indirectly so, under the rubric of 'socialization' or the family.⁹ 'Socialization' is one of the concepts that textbooks present as basic to the discipline (see also Thorne 1987).

This trend is confirmed by most of the 'sociologies of childhood' published so far, i.e. the books that have been written by professional sociologists with the particular intention of presenting sociology's specific contribution to children and childhood (Brown 1939; Bossard 1947; Ritchie & Koller 1964; Bossard & Ball 1966; Fürstenau

⁹ She finds, on closer analysis, that quantitatively (in terms of number of pages) children still constitute the smallest constituent among the major topics covered in the books (Ambert 1986, 116-17).

1969; Wallner & Pohler-Funke 1978; Shipman 1982). Oscar W. Ritchie and Marvin R. Koller, for instance, write in the preface of their book (1964, viii) that socialization is the central concept to be used when one wants to put together existing sociological data on childhood "in a meaningful way". For them, the sociological study of children is identical to the examination of the means by which children become members of human groups. Relevant knowledge pertains to those social groups that impinge upon children: this kind of knowledge forms the substance of the sociology of childhood (ibid, 12).

Similarly, Peter Fürstenau (1969) writes that socialization - defined as the transmission of techniques, meanings and values shared by the members of society and determining their social behaviour - is "the nucleus of the sociology of childhood" (ibid, 9-10) and that the sociology of childhood consists of all the contributions that sociology is able to make in the investigation of this process. For him the relevant contributions lie scattered in several fields of sociological research, most importantly in studies of the family and of 'family-replacing institutions', but also in studies of education and youth (ibid, 86-88). The sociology of childhood is constructed essentially by picking up this scattered knowledge.

Significantly, in these books, 'child development' appears as a ready synonym to the central concept of socialization. Ernst M. Wallner and Margret Pohler-Funke's book (1978) is a very clear example of this, but the trend is easy to detect in all presentations relying on 'socialization'. The authors base their account of childhood on a psychological framing of the bodily, mental and spiritual development of the child. The childhood phase consists of a series of subphases that run like a staircase, which is the total development process. In each step, or subphase, the child relates to his closest environment differently. Each phase also contains a range of risks and problems for the child's development. - The frame and the vocabulary used up to this point is taken from psychology. At this point the authors change their focus to the "web of relations" that connects the child to his/her social environment. (A short passage titled

"childhood and society" marks the dividing point.) They therefore translate those aspects that are earlier identified as the core of childhood into sociological terms such as roles, identification, identity and internalization: individual development is reinterpreted and renamed. The writers' conclusion is that the contribution that sociology may make to the understanding of childhood lies heavily on the side of this "web of relations" - the family, peer group, leisure time relations etc. - because of their significance for child development.

In a similar manner, the books by James H.S. Bossard (1947) and Bossard and Eleanor Stoker Ball (1966) present the child's individual development as the essence of childhood. (Consistently to this, they name their two books "The sociology of child development".) They start from the idea that the experience of growing up - meaning (individual) development into maturity - is universal and that a range of sciences studies this experience. Some disciplines focus on the behaving individual, whereas the particular concern of sociology is on the side of the social situations that influence and provoke the child's behaviour and development.¹⁰

Approaches to childhood that lean on 'socialization' have become suspect for not being adequately sociological. They are criticized e.g. on the grounds that they exhibit privileged notions of childhood that are psychological (Qvortrup 1985). This holds at least for the 'sociologies of childhood' referred to above: they begin from a concept of the child's individual development and let this concept carve out the contribution that sociology could possibly make for its understanding. This turns out to concern the 'environment', or 'ecology' of the developing child, examples of this being families and familial relationships, schools and day care settings, the media supply and culture

¹⁰ Trent (1987) gives a historical account of the interest that U.S. sociologists showed in the field of child development particularly in the 1920s and the 1930s. W.I. and Dorothy Thomas, for instance, published a study with the promising title of *The Child in America* (1928). They, as well as a few other sociologists involved in the field (Davies, Burgess, Young), failed to develop an original sociological tradition for the study of children, and instead used existing research on children to carve out related research areas. This, among other social and cognitive factors, made the sociological interest in child research wane by the time of World War II.

that reach the child etc. Thus the sociologist is put into the position of having to take for granted one or another non-sociological notion of the child. By renaming the continuously evolving relationship of the psychologically abstracted child to her immediate social environment as 'socialization', merely conceals this fact. By dealing with the problem of childhood through socialization and by conceiving of it as contextualized individual development, sociologists assume, in an uncritical way, the discourse of psychology (Qvortrup 1985, 131).

Some of the above mentioned 'sociologies of childhood', however, at least hint towards a genuinely sociological argument. When, for instance, Wallner and Pohler-Funke (1978) accept socialization as the conceptual startingpoint they want to draw attention to the institutions - or "webs of relations" as they call them - through which children move as they are induced (socialized) into "maturity and adult life". For them, the study of childhood is accomplished through the sociological analysis of the family and of education. Fürstenau (1969), as already mentioned, adds a few more sectional sociologies to this list. Thus the sociological study of childhood comprises the sociologies of the family, or education, or peer groups, and so on - or all of them together, as Fürstenau recommends. - This, in fact, appears to be the everyday understanding of the sociological profession as to where to situate the sociology of childhood: in some of the already existing sectional sociologies of social institutions.

The point that comes under critique in these latter attempts to solve the problem of childhood, is that they in turn discuss children in terms of specific the institutions, within which, admittedly, they live. In sociological studies of education, for instance, the emphasis is on the education system itself rather than on the children's educational experience, the educational process is treated as a "black box" where children are evaluated as output in relation to teaching techniques, curricula or class organization and, in general, data are based on the analysis of academic records and teachers' evaluations of children (Blitzer 1991, 15). Even in sociological studies of the family (Leonard 1990, 62) children are not seen as social actors within the home and

community. They are, for instance, not asked what domestic work they do or if they contribute to the household income, but taken to be consumers of adult's time or beings, about, or for whom, things in families are decided.

This placing of children into institutional regimes is also evident in the survey of (North American) sociological journals (Ambert 1986, 17-18): whereas the general journals practically ignore children, one might expect that the journals specializing in institutional sectors inhabited also by children (family, education) would provide more focus on children and childhood. This is, somewhat surprisingly, not so. Ambert concludes that the part of sociology literature which is aimed at one's peers in the system of scientific communication - i.e. journals - lend even less space to children than do textbooks which are the more "popular" sociology literature and which reach larger numbers of readers.¹¹ Two things are thus accomplished: for sociological theory, the duality of the (psychological) child and her (social) environment retains its unreflected preassumption in the issue of childhood, and children remain in the margins of sociological knowledge.

4. The new Childhood Studies

As was stated at the beginning of the study, the marginalization of children has no longer appeared acceptable. The silence concerning children in sociological research has been noted, and its justification questioned. Children are 'people to be studied in their own right' (Hardman 1973, cit. in Prout & James 1990, 8; also Joffe 1973, and Leonard 1990). In addition, the empirical study of children and childhood is not insignificant to sociology for childhood is an experience which all members of society

¹¹ Furstenberg, an American family sociologist, also laments that among the huge numbers of sociological researchers who study the family only a tiny fraction have sustained an interest in children. The "peculiar territorial division" that exists "between psychology and sociology has almost guaranteed that research on children was divorced from research on the family" (Furstenberg 1985, 281-282).

share and which has a marked influence on us all by shaping the perspective that will remain with us throughout life (Adler & Adler 1986, 3). This experience, moreover, is socially organized and the social location from which it emanates is a permanent element of social structure, despite its transitional occupancy by individual members of the social category of children (Qvortrup 1987, 4-5). Children and childhood are therefore not a special problem to be studied apart from general sociological problems; they connect to a range of other issues and social processes and are approachable from a number of sociological viewpoints.

Emergent perspectives like these have also questioned the status of childhood in sociology's conceptual apparatus. Chris Jenks, in his *Sociology of childhood* (1982), began his introductory text by noting that "from the earliest Socratic dialogues onwards social theorists have systematically endeavoured to constitute a view of the child that is compatible with their particular visions of social life" (Jenks 1982, 9). Thus somewhere within sociological theory the unknown child exists. Jenks' explanation of how social theories have managed to keep this child invisible and unheard of is this: they in fact begin from a specific and given model of structured human conduct and then seek to explain childhood as teleologically related to that preestablished end. Thus the view of the child and childhood is constructed derivatively, more as an afterthought and as a support for the main construction; it has been negatively defined, i.e. not by what the child is, but what she is subsequently going to be. (Ibid, 14)

Sociological worlds, in particular, are constructed in terms of universal 'rational adults' without regard to the fact that our everyday experience as practical members of real social worlds abounds with children (Jenks 1982, 14). He calls this scientific practice 'ethnocentrism' and urges the reader to make a critical reconstruction of such sets of assumptions as they are available in the 'essential readings' (subtitle) of his selection of texts for a sociology of childhood. Among them are excerpts and articles by social historians (e.g. Ariès, Platt), psychologists (Piaget, Erikson, Morano), ethnographers (Iona and Peter Opie), anthropologists (Margaret Mead), philosophers

(Merleau-Ponty, Bachelard, O'Neill) as well as sociologists (Durkheim, Parsons, Foucault, Denzin, Mannheim). Jenks begins the necessary exercise himself by submitting Parsons' theory of the social system, and Piaget's developmental theory, to such an analysis (*ibid*, 15-23).

Childhood is thus set into motion even within sociology, and in a double sense: first, the presence of children in social life is increasingly acknowledged as a social fact and, at present, their mode of presence appears to be undergoing radical transformation. This displays the gaps that we have in available knowledge of children's lives and activities. But, more importantly, the conventional understanding (assumption) of what childhood is also has become unstable: childhood is a theoretical and a conceptual problem as well.

It is evident that childhood, understood as a historical, social, economical, political and cultural phenomenon, also expands the field of childhood research far beyond the traditional 'childhood sciences' of psychology and pedagogy. There are, for instance, in philosophy, signs that children and childhood are included as topics of major philosophical interest (Scarre 1989). A new interdisciplinary field of research - Childhood Studies (*Kindheitsforschung*, *Barndomsforskning*) - is emerging and emerging interest in childhood is not easily dismissed as a mere fad that arises, perhaps, out of a weariness of conventional themes or topics (Geulen 1989, 7). On the other hand, Childhood Studies also promise to be more than a simple addition to the existing body of thematic specialisms within the social sciences. It may even prove to be of some significance to the internal organization of sociological knowledge itself. At present this is, to be sure, no more than a vision, but a vision that contains the outlines of an agenda for advancing the sociological study of childhood.

5. Modern childhood? The aim and structure of the study

This is, then, the current state of writing about children and childhood among sociologists: there are some long-lived traditions of thinking about childhood but these are also criticized; sociology's empirical knowledge of childhood is clearly lacking to some extent but studies are also conducted in order to begin to correct this situation; the concepts and frameworks that sociologists have made use of are criticized for not being adequate; alternative approaches are tried out and new paradigms suggested for developing the 'child question' and for bringing the study of childhood into the discipline of sociology.

The present study aims to contribute to such an undertaking by seeking to specify the concepts by which childhood might be understood as a **modern social phenomenon**. The 'child question', as it has been described above, defines for the purposes of the present study both a starting point and a methodology: the way childhood is understood in sociology is fully questioned, and it is compared to other 'questions' (concerning class, gender, race and ethnicity) which by now have already been given attention to on sociology's research agendas. These other 'questions', moreover, suggest a possible way for elaborating that concerning children. Among these other questions, the 'woman question' is picked out as the critical **reference point** for assessing the quality of childhood knowledge in sociology. In this study, however, the theorization of the 'woman question', as it has taken place in the social sciences, provides something more: it is taken to contain a **working model**, or a methodology, for generating possible solutions to different aspects of the 'child question' within sociology.

Why the 'woman question' and feminism; why not for instance the class question which is much better established within sociological theory and research?

First, because women and children seem to exist in much the same locations in social life. Children appear to belong to women's everyday lives but not in the same

way or extent as in men's lives (Jensen 1992). Women and children are frequently defined in terms of each other (Thorne 1987, 95). Women and children are also often lumped together into a unity that is relegated - not seldomly as 'nature' - to the private sphere of families and households (Hughes 1988). Women do the main part of child-care and they tend to develop greater emotional bonds with children. Therefore, research on women may provide a shorter road to a sociological understanding of childhood than some other spheres of research.

But women and children not only exist in much the same spaces. The past and the present of women's and children's social situation suggest also that children might be related to other social groups and categories in ways that have much to do with the ways in which women are related to men. Therefore, the concepts and the theories that have been developed to account for women's place in society might also be used to attempt the same in the case of children.

There is even a third reason for regarding feminist research as a useful guide and that is the identification of the present state of Childhood Studies with the first stage of feminist research two decades ago. For instance, they both started from similar observations of women's and children's presence (or, rather, their absence) in scientific knowledge and did not leave this unquestioned. Academic feminism has advanced from its early days and Women's Studies into a multidisciplinary feminist science that claims to be no mere addition to and correction of earlier knowledge but a critical issue concerning the institution of science, its foundations and its usefulness. - A similar life course can now be envisioned even for Childhood Studies; children's marginality is already being criticized as unfair discrimination and correction of the obvious gaps in our knowledge is sought by adding children into the scientific domain.

This line of thinking structures the present study. The research agenda that academic feminism has followed in its own development is the methodological starting point while also serving as a guideline for the present study; it is organized accordingly.

The study first looks at the development of academic feminism as it brought the 'woman question' into science and developed its own research agenda (chapter I: Feminist lessons). This is then adopted in the next four chapters (II. - V.). In each of these, conceptual and methodological insights of feminist research are extended to matters of childhood, using the growing pool of childhood research as a resource.

The results of the conceptual and methodological exploration from feminism into the rather more unknown territory of childhood, are put to work in chapter VI. The empirical data discussed in the chapter come from a Nordic study on women and children living in one-parent households. However, rather than providing a report of childhood as it is lived in a such social setting (this is done in a separate report of the project; see Footnote 3 on page 114), the chapter presents an exercise in 'childist' (cf. feminist) research.

These explorations are then discussed in a concluding chapter which summarizes and assesses the results, and and gives some reflections on the experience of adopting a feminist research strategy for developing a sociology of childhood.

I. FEMINIST LESSONS

1. The 'child question' in feminism

Children have been a central concern for feminists from the beginning.¹ In the writings of the earliest feminists, motivated by the perspective of the Enlightenment, children appeared primarily in the context of their arguments for educating children of both sexes, on the grounds that learning and socialization - and not natural capacities of the sexes - were responsible for the formation of mind (Andersen 1983, 242). The education of girls and women would, moreover, have important repercussions on their motherhood, or in the words of Mary Wollstonecraft, the "grand duty annexed to the female character by nature" (Wollstonecraft 1973 [1792], 72). From Rousseau, Wollstonecraft learned that an appeal to nature and natural rights could be a way of undermining an unjust society, but she also spotted its dangerous ideological content: such appeals were also used to maintain social inequalities (Walters 1976, 319). This she thought, applied to the parental affection that women felt for their children: perhaps there was 'a natural tie', but as such it would remain a 'very faint' one - and help to uphold the status quo - unless women were educated to be enlightened mothers (Wollstonecraft 1973 [1792], 71-73). - Thus in the first feminist texts the 'child question' appeared within their treatment of women's motherhood.

¹ Feminist history starts before the concepts of feminism and feminist emerged. According to Rossi (1983, xii-xiii) this took place in the 1890s; the terms first appeared in the public press in 1895, surrounded, until the turn of the century, by quotation marks. Thus the early activists and advocates of the women's (rights) movement did not identify themselves as feminists.

The problem of children continued to appear in feminist writing as the first wave of the women's movement was set into motion in the late 19th century, and it continued to be formulated as the 'motherhood question'. By this time the 'modern' (private) family had been established in the West as the normative model for understanding and organizing the relations between men and women, parents and children.² Women's work and worlds became segregated from men's; women became dependent on particular men - private patriarchy reigned (Brown 1982). The doctrine of separate spheres offered no alternative to the view that women, who gave birth to children, should also do the primary child raising.

The emerging cult of motherhood was tied to the idea that it was an activity which required study and thought - an idea that had been expressed already in the earlier feminist writing. Educators now emphasized mothers' responsibility not only for the physical care of their children but for shaping their characters; this was elevated into a mother's vocation. - Childhood socialization, and not merely the physical care of children, became subsumed under the concept of motherhood (Ryan 1979b, 159).

This conception was taken by feminists to justify a social and public function for women: through their motherly contributions they helped to stabilize society. Feminists argued, moreover, that as motherhood gave women a special capacity for moral reform and improving the world, the domestic importance and private skills of women as mothers should be officially recognized and also given full reign in the public domain (Ryan 1979a; Maroney 1986; Riley 1988; Cova 1991, 121). Thus the hegemonic claims that gender differences and labour divisions were biologically determined facts of life were not challenged by this "maternal feminism". Instead, the feminists of the time made an ideology of difference of their own. Women's moral, cultural and practical skills and values were meant only to extend the boundaries of differentiated spheres and not to break them down (Maroney 1986, 421).

² See Ostner (1989) for its development in Germany and Zaretsky (1992) in Northern America.

The contemporary "second wave" feminist movement, emerging in the 1960s, took up the motherhood question in a different social context and developed it in its own terms. The heart of women's oppression was now³ seen in her child-bearing and child-rearing role, as noted by one of the early "radical" feminists, Firestone (1979 [1970], 73), but this was no longer taken to be an eternal fact. On the contrary, the restriction of women's lives to ahistorical maternity and childcare responsibilities, however socially recognized or valued, meant for women a patriarchal prescription for compulsory motherhood that hindered their liberation (Sevenhuijsen & de Vries 1984, 12-13). The problem of motherhood was to be a problem of choice, non-motherhood being one of them. Firestone's solution to the motherhood question was the most radical one of the 1960s and early 1970s: on the level of personal politics, to reject it⁴, and on the level of public politics, to totally abolish it (Firestone 1979).

The rejection of the traditional idea of motherhood was an important element in the construction of a feminist identity and a necessary step in dealing with sexist ideology that had represented maternity, life with children and the labour of childcare as women's ahistorical and natural destiny and duty. Therefore, motherhood as well as non-motherhood had to be a free option (Sevenhuijsen & de Vries 1984, 11-13; Maroney 1986, 398; Rowbotham 1989, 82). But it could also lead to denying the importance of motherhood as such and to devalue the skills and values that were associated with mothering (Maroney 1986, 401). The feminist self-questioning about a formerly taken-for-granted motherhood had now been started; the issue was beginning to be theorized as a social and political phenomenon far apart from any biological fact (Sevenhuijsen & de Vries 1984, 12-13). In this context, the place of children was taken up by only one of the early second wave activists, namely Shulamith Firestone (1979 [1970]).

³ Snitow finds that the discussion of motherhood in North American feminism falls in three periods, the first of them (under discussion here) being from the 1960s to the middle of the 1970s.

⁴ This was in fact not a novel suggestion; it had already been argued by Simone de Beauvoir, in writing her famous work on the "second sex" (1972 [1949]) long before the second wave, as the only solution for the "independent woman" (Simons 1990, 161-163).

Her treatment of the 'child question' was equally radical as was that of motherhood. Because women were tied with children, both groups suffer shared oppression which is "intertwined and mutually reinforcing in such complex ways that we will be unable to speak of the liberation of women without also discussing the liberation of children, and vice versa" (Firestone 1979, 73). Therefore, the abolition of oppressive motherhood would imply the elimination of an equally oppressive childhood, accomplished by the patriarchal family form. Firestone referred here extensively to Ariès's analysis on the rise of the modern family, with its adjunct 'childhood', and the Age of Childhood (ibid, 75-89). With the increase and exaggeration of children's dependence, woman's bondage to motherhood was also extended to its limits; the two oppressions began to reinforce each other, and in the present time, the myth has been magnified (ibid, 89-90). The myth of childhood, moreover, kept flourishing at present for the reason that it satisfied the needs of adults and not of children. Therefore, Firestone urged the reader to go on to find out what childhood is *really* like, and not what it is like in adult heads. Her own conclusion is that, contrary to prevailing childhood myth, children are not freer than adults.

"They are burdened by a wish fantasy in direct proportion to the restraints of their narrow lives; with an unpleasant sense of their own physical inadequacy and ridiculousness, with constant shame about their dependence, economic and otherwise ('Mother, may I?'); and humiliation concerning their natural ignorance of practical affairs. Children are repressed at every waking minute. Childhood is hell." (Firestone 1979, 101)

And so it was up to feminists to show an interest in children and grant them their due political importance. The oppression of children was, moreover, to be included in any programme for feminist revolution "or we will be subject to the same failing of which we have so often accused men: of not having gone deep enough in our analysis, of having missed an important substratum of oppression merely because it didn't concern *us*" (p. 102). - Firestone was exceptional in discussing the "alliance of the oppressed" in this manner. She also remained alone in this, perhaps because of the speculative, or utopian genre of her writing. It has been often misread and falsely

called a 'mother-hating' book whereas her point is rather to 'smash patriarchy' and not to attack mothers (Snitow 1992, 36).

By the end of the 1970s feminism entered universities and explorations of motherhood continued to form an important issue within the emerging interdisciplinary Women's Studies. Research on motherhood was now inspired by the distinction between the social and political **institution** of motherhood and motherhood as an **experience** that could be released from patriarchal burdens (Rich 1977). This distinction opened a space in which both institutional and experiential aspects of motherhood (and their links) were deeply explored: the socially and historically constructed images, myths, ideals, models, ideologies and scientific theories of motherhood as well as their institutionalizing (e.g. Knibbielher & Fouquet 1977; Gordon 1978; Ehrenreich & English 1978; O'Brien 1981; Dally 1982; Riley 1983; Urwin 1985; Rothman 1989; Arnup et al. 1990; Marshall 1991; Kaplan 1992) and the daily life, the work and the experience of being a mother (e.g. Oakley 1979, 1980; Boulton 1981; Gieve 1989, Gordon 1991).

Because everyday motherhood, or **mothering**, involves children, the opening of research on women's experience at least contained the possibility of redefining the 'child question' and bringing it more prominently into feminist research.

The feminist concept of mothering⁵ stresses that motherhood does not denote what women are - by biology or whatever - but what they (potentially) **do** and, moreover, that this is **not all** that women do. 'Mothering', more than 'being a mother', thus turned the focus on motherhood as a social activity that was undertaken and performed under social conditions - within a social division of labour and not as a biological destiny. It also emphasized women's agency as mothers, that is, their acting as mothers in society among other actors (Gieve 1987, 39). This also helped to move the study of motherhood into frameworks that were familiar from within conventional

⁵ The term itself is not a feminist invention. Its use dates back to the 1950s at least: Bowlby, for instance, uses the term in many of his influential books (e.g. Bowlby 1953) prescribing "good mothering".

sociology, particularly those of social control and power, creating also a conceptual bridge between women's mothering experiences and the historical and social construction of motherhood and its political control as well as women's resistance. The historical and cultural diversity of motherhood constructs, as well as different modes of mothering came into view; a monolithic concept of motherhood was abandoned (e.g. Lewin 1985; O'Barr & Pope & Wyer 1990).

Thus, the feminist conception of mothering is based on mothering/childcare being socially necessary work that is differentially and, in contemporary Western societies, unequally divided between women and men, and both economically and culturally devalued. At the same time the conception, however, also objectifies children by glossing over activities that are done *on* children. Children, although participants in the activities of mothering along with women - not only mothers but also other child-workers - are thereby not seen as social actors as are women.

There is also another line of thinking about motherhood within feminism that starts from the institution of motherhood as the basis of women's oppression while also ending with the objectification of children. Here children's near exclusive mothering by women, interpreted as a 'structural universal', suggests another kind of explanation of the continuation of male dominance (e.g. Dinnerstein 1976; Chodorow 1978; critically: Trebilcock 1983; Gottlieb 1984; Johnson 1988). Whereas conventional sociology (and anthropology) has tended to see women's mothering as more or less deriving from a combination of women's biology and children's needs for survival and development, feminist analysis has held to its distinction of sex and gender and interpreted observable gender divisions, as social constructions. But similarly to conventional sociology, this analysis continues to present children merely as objects with needs, translated into demands of care. Therefore, in this type of analysis, children have merely functioned as the instrument by which patriarchal society reproduces prevailing gender arrangements that feminists seek to transform (Thorne 1987, 92).

2. Childhood in feminist perspectives

Basically, feminist thinking is based on the conviction that the woman's place is integrally embedded in social life. Therefore, to shift or disrupt it, as feminists wish to do, is potentially to shift and disrupt much else (Eisenstein 1984, xiii). In so far as children are located in the same places with women, these disruptions will also affect children. The conclusion from the preceding survey is that not much disruption has taken place in and by feminist research; it has tended to marginalize children just as is done in mainstream sociology, and to produce equally functionalist and adult (woman) -centred analyses on children and childhood.

This is changing, however. Child-related issues and the notions of childhood that are employed in actual gender politics have already proved consequential for women. Scientific knowledge about childhood can be turned against women and present, poorly developed conceptions of adult-child relations and children's interests are putting women into disadvantaged positions e.g. in custody disputes and in the public 'war over the family' (see e.g. Gordon 1986; Stacey 1986; Cohen & Katzenstein 1988; Skold 1988; Smart 1989). Thus it is becoming obvious that the continuing marginal place given to children within feminist consciousness and research also helps to maintain a number of women's problems as invisible, both in theory and in feminist practice.

This has been noticed in the discussion about motherhood. The exclusive framing of motherhood as an issue of choice keeps lumping women and children together and sharing the same oppression (Sevenhuijsen & de Vries 1984, 15). Feminist theories of motherhood have been limited in a particular way, and they have not been able to move further because they have been trapped in the dominant cultural assumptions about mothering. These in turn rest on unexamined notions of childhood, particularly on children's 'needs', derived from psychological models of child development (Chodorow & Contratto 1982, 69-71). Translated into children's authentic 'interests'

these needs were inevitably considered, as well as experienced, as constraints on women, making children into women's "appendices" while necessarily treating women and children as adversaries. Thus the feminist theoretical project about the liberation of women could not simultaneously consider the liberation of children. Therefore, a separate 'child question' never came up.

The other alternative was to derive children's 'needs' from assumptions about desirable gender arrangements to which children were later expected to conform. This meant making - within a reproductionist theory of society - societal needs into 'needs' of children, with the obvious result of an extraordinary isomorphism of children's and women's interests. In addition, here a separate 'child question' could never come up here for consideration (see Sevenhuijsen & de Vries 1984, 15; Gordon 1986, 70; Cohen & Katzenstein 1988, 34-37).

A feminist theory of motherhood seems not to be possible without a critical theory of childhood (Chodorow & Contratto 1982, 70-71). This is the present stage of feminist thinking; for its own future it needs also to develop its thinking and practice about children and childhood. This may benefit also the sociological elaboration of the 'child question'. Substantial lessons can be learned, however, from feminist scholarship even now.

Firstly, there are the noticeable **similarities** and **parallels** in the social situation of women and children, repeatedly mentioned since the beginning of feminist scholarship, but usually left undeveloped (e.g. Hardman 1973; Thorne 1987). These may provide useful leads for rethinking the relationship between children and adults analogically to the relationship between women and men.

Secondly, the fact that feminist inquiry has focussed on locations that **connect** women and children may also lead to theoretical insights into the social reality of child life. By evading the risk of adult (feminine/maternal) bias and by including children in the analysis as social actors (Chodorow & Contratto 1982, 71), feminist analyses of e.g. mothering and child-care, family life and school life - that is, analyses of locations

where gender relations and child-adult relations intertwine - may be developed usefully. Following here the practices of a feminist methodology (e.g. Stanley & Wise 1990) should almost automatically lead researchers to also include children, as their research subjects, on an equal basis to adults (mothers, teachers etc.) and, furthermore, to respect children's knowledge, i.e. to treat children as 'knowers'.

The work of 'deconstructing' the many ideological figurations and images of women and femininity (see e.g. Barrett 1980, 29-38; Thorne 1987; Alanen 1990, 21-24) may also be helpful for deconstructing 'the child' and childhood. In any case feminist research offers methodological advice here, but considering that childhood is included in many constructions of womanhood, a rereading of deconstructionist works inspired by feminism may also expose many received notions of childhood to critical analysis (see e.g. Cohen & Katzenstein 1988; Prout & James 1990, 23-24).

The issue of what qualifies as knowledge pertains not only to strategies of empirical research and questions such as the status to be given to children as informants. The 'science question in feminism' is, as mentioned above, really about the standpoints from which the world can be 'known'. Feminist scholars have argued as well as convincingly demonstrated, that established sociology "knows" society from a masculine standpoint. This knowledge has been written into the sociological texts by which any sociologist comes to look at, interpret, explain and research that which is social. There exists then no "innocent" knowledge located outside particular standpoints, no "bird's eye view" from a position that is no one's in particular. Thus the project of writing a feminist sociology has to start from the locations where women actually are, where they participate in the social relations that organize their "everyday/everynight" world, their experiences as well as their knowledge. This is sociology from a women's standpoint (Smith 1988, 1989). - Extending this logic from women to children, once again, is to establish the possibility of a sociology from the children's standpoint.

Feminist analyses are diverse; there is no single set of claims beyond a few generalities that could be called "feminism" without inviting controversy. Academic feminists claim that diverse historical frameworks and projects and feminist discussions within science are constrained by different political, practical and conceptual perspectives that they bring to bear on science, its beliefs, practices and institutions. The term "feminism" is itself also a contested zone within feminism. Feminists have analyzed human nature, the fundamental causes of women's inferior conditions, and what should be done to change those conditions within several distinctive traditions of thought. Most important are the "grand theory" traditions that borrow from Western political theory: liberal feminism and Marxist feminism. Also the feminisms that emerged in the politics of the 1960s have been developed: radical feminism, socialist feminism and the feminisms of the racially marginalized women both in the West and in the Third World.

3. Learning from feminism

Academic feminism is part of a critical tradition in science. Therefore feminist lessons are presented here in terms of the modes of critique - and reconstruction - of 'scientific' knowledge as they have developed within feminist scholarship. There is some temporal succession between them, which is why the lessons may be told as a 'story' in which an earlier form of critique prepares both a vision and the foundation for the next one. This is, however, not to suggest that any of them are out of practice, outmoded or surpassed in any definite sense; on the contrary, all the modes of knowledge critique and reconstruction to be presented are in continuous use within Women's studies/feminist research.

The entitlement of particularly the historically first mode of critique (below: 'sexual politics') to the epithet 'feminist' is nowadays being periodically questioned.

Its inclusion in 'feminist lessons' is justified, however, and not only for historical reasons but also because the accomplishments of the other ('later') lessons come into perspective only in their relation to the pioneering stage of academic feminism.

3.1. Sexual politics

Feminism entered science with the criticism that invisible, unrecognized 'sexual politics' (Millet 1971) prevailed in the institution of science and that this resulted in male bias in the knowledge that was generated. Attention was directed to demonstrate the pervasiveness of 'sexism' - the discrimination of women because of their sex - in science and to initiate change (e.g. Andersen 1983, 3-20; DuBois et al. 1985, 15-18).

Feminist criticism argues that women are marginally present in academic life and its disciplines, that women are also overlooked as subjects for scholarly research, that research findings that are based on all-male samples are falsely generalized and that, by implication, also the methods, language and concepts that have been developed are falsely generalizable. Moreover, the problems and issues of concern to women are ignored or seen as unworthy of study, leaving the female part of the social world unknown. Finally, when women are included as research subjects they get presented in ways that distort their lives, achievements and experiences (Andersen 1983, 10-20; Eichler 1988; Abbott & Wallace 1990, 1-6).

Women are, thus, discriminated in the choice of sociology's **research topics**. Feminists have repeatedly noticed the neglect of issues concerning women in the classification of their discipline's subject-areas. These tend to reflect the concerns of men and the social relevances of men's lives and activities. The knowledge thus generated, necessarily gives a partial presentation of social life. Another form of partiality is accomplished through the roles allotted to women in studies that include women: they are included specifically and only in terms of the specific (functional) relationship they have to men. Thus Susan Moller Okin (1979, 10) argues that political

theorists have tended to define man by describing ideal human nature whereas woman is defined in relation to man, i.e. as wife and mother within a patriarchal family. Men and women, in other words, have been differentially and unequally in focus: men for the things that they do (or are capable of doing), women for what they are for. Women are seen, again, from a male point of view, but here it is also underlined that man is the actor whereas woman is acted upon, rather than being a social actor herself. Such treatment of women is in fact a matter of 'pseudo-inclusion': the theory (or study) appears to take women into account but then marginalizes them (Thiele 1986, 33). Durkheim's classical study of suicide is an excellent example of this in sociology: the statistical data that Durkheim uses in his analysis contradicts his thesis about why people commit suicide, but rather than change the theory or admit that it is not universally applicable, he explains that this is because of the peculiarities of woman's 'nature' and women, therefore, are in fact unsuitable subjects for his study (March 1982, ref. Thiele 1986).

Another practice in making women invisible, although including women in studies is to measure women's lives, activities and experiences with **standards** that are derived from observing and assessing men's lives, behaviours and experiences, and to interpret such data through male categories. Men's perspective interferes with the interpretation of women's lives, and thus the parameters of women's lives become distorted. Thiele (1986, 33) calls this form of women's invisibility, their 'alienation'. Studies of such sociological topics as class oppression, stratification, work and political power and participation often display such sexism (Stacey & Price 1981; Wajcman 1981; Thiele 1986, 34; Abbott & Wallace 1990). Once again, the male case presents the standard or normal case and the study is actually meant to find out how many women "fit" into such male-derived standards. Therefore, the results do not speak for women in general, hardly even for a majority of them.

Such acts of sexist discrimination thus result in partial knowledge that is more accurately identified as **male-centredness** (or androcentricity). Male-centredness may

enter the problematics which are selected as worthy of study, the hypotheses to be tested and the designs of research as well as the collecting, processing and interpreting of data and the construction of evidence to support the presented argument, which is continued in conceptualization and theory formation (Smith 1987; Eichler 1988; Harding 1991).

In the late 1960s and the early 1970s, male-centredness was understood to function as "blindness" in scientific work. The researcher was not following carefully enough the scientific method and generated, therefore, "bad" science. "Better" science would follow if s/he attempted to recognize the blinders and abandon them (Harding 1988a, 61-62; 1991, 57-58). Feminist critique was needed to help achieve this recognition, but corrective research was also necessary in many areas in order to make visible what had remained out of sight because of the long prevailing male-centredness.

The new research would, first, start filling the observed gaps in existing knowledge and, second, revise existing knowledge for its distortions.

The first task generated research on completely new issues reflecting neglected concerns, such as housework, childbirth, mothering, incest, abortion, rape, wife abuse, heterosexuality, sexual harassment, pornography and equal rights. It also meant a re-examination of some conventional topics, such as work, power, political participation and stratification, in order to add the missing women's part to existing knowledge.

The second task implied reanalysis and reinterpretation of existing empirical and theoretical knowledge. Reinterpretation was particularly called for when the new data and observations gained in researching women could not be fitted into available analytical frames and theories. A case of such anomalies was the finding (Kelly-Gadol 1976) that showed that the Renaissance had not changed women's status as had occurred with men; in fact, women's status declined in this period. Similarly, when evidence from political studies showed that modernization (in the sense of individual citizenship and civil rights) started in European countries in the late eighteenth

century, it now appeared that what was at issue was the modernization of men. Scholars seldom paid attention to the position of women at that time; had they done so, it would have become evident that instead of becoming 'modernized', women were paradoxically brought into a position of greater dependence (van Vucht Tijssen 1990, 154). Such findings made Renaissance, modernity or any other standard historical periodisations, suspect as an adequate analytical category and meant encouragement for rethinking of alternative categories, this time based on women's experiences.

Any of the conventional notions in sociology now called for similar critical consideration. The notion of worker, for instance, as it was used in the sociology of work appeared not to consider the sexless worker it had purported to examine but in fact the male worker; therefore it was not useful for studying women's work experiences (Dex 1985). The conventional distinction between the public and the private (or domestic, or familial) spheres seemed to represent, possibly, well enough, the structure of (some) men's everyday lives, but this was not so in the case of women (e.g. Rubin 1976; Tilly & Scott 1978). Men's and women's experiences of family life also differed: Jessie Bernard showed this in terms of marriage (Bernard 1971a), in writing that "there are actually two marriages in every marital union - his and hers - which do not always coincide" (Bernard 1971b). As further research confirmed the variation of experiences of even the 'same' family, the usefulness of any unitary and harmonizing notions of domestic relationships and divisions was questioned for keeping such differences out of vision and recognition. Other notions were needed in order to put women back into scientific knowledge on more equal terms. For this, new analytical categories were developed.

3.2. Gender analytics

The feminist project of gender equality, in both society and science, is based on the idea that the observed differences between men and women are social and not natural.

Because of this conviction the prospect of change in women's social position could be maintained. The conceptual confirmation of this idea is the distinction between sex and gender in which 'sex' refers to the biological division into female and male, and 'gender' to the parallel social (and socially unequal) divisions. 'Gender', and not 'sex', became the appropriate analytical tool for the social sciences.

The source from which feminists originally adopted the concept of gender was Stoller's (1968) research on psycho-sexual identity. He adopted the term 'gender' to account for the observed fact that a person's sex identity does not always conform to his or her biological sex. Gender was one's sexual identity - identity as sex - and was better understood to result from processes of cultural attribution and individual learning than that determined by biology; this, in fact, played a minor role in the development of gender.

Kate Millett (1971) and Ann Oakley (1972, 1981) used Stoller's account and adopted the gender terminology in challenging biologicistic assumptions in explaining women's social condition. Both of them further underlined the relativity of biological sex for the understanding of this by referring to findings of anthropologists that showed that differences between the sexes exist in every culture, but that gender identity in them varies greatly and the forms this takes can be quite contradictory.

Thus the distinction between sex and gender was originally intended to dispute the biology-is-destiny formulation in the women's case. The argument was that whatever sex was, it was seemingly more fixed than gender, which was culturally constructed. Gender, also, did not follow from sex as if it were its causal effect. The latter insight, taken to its logical limit, suggested a radical discontinuity between sex and gender, and this, in turn, opened an autonomous theoretical space for the study of gender.

In sociology particularly, women's condition, relationships, activities and experiences could be theorized with 'gender' on a much broader base than was possible with the conventional - and for feminists increasingly problematical - notion

of 'sex roles' which since the Parsonian 1950s had been the only (weak) alternative to biologism.⁶ The historical and cultural construction of the relationship of sex and gender was also a new inspiration for rethinking the origins of women's oppression. The anthropologist Gayle Rubin's early article (1975), in which she introduced the notion of the 'sex/gender system', was influential in the feminist discussion. By this she meant the "set of arrangements by which society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (Rubin 1975, 159). For sociologists analyzing women's position in contemporary societies the "set of arrangements" part of this definition gave the necessary impetus for developing the concept of gender as a structural formation, beyond the cultural interpretation of sex and the inscription of meaning on sexed bodies. Thus the gender system (or gender structure) could be understood in analogy to class: regulating, organizing and positioning people in different places of value and with different access to participation in social life, and doing this relatively independently of individual acts and consciousness.

As a structural feature of every (known) society, gender pervades social life, from social institutions to the practices of everyday life, from culture and science to the beliefs and behaviours of "ordinary people" in their daily interactions. To make all this visible, gender was now used as a descriptive category in all fields of research. The study of gender was also not limited to any distinctively feminist issue, such as the social situation of women or the analysis of male domination; rather, gender was everywhere (Flax 1987, 622-623).

⁶ The problems of the concept of sex role follow from its ties to one or another version of role theory: it focuses attention more on individuals than on social structures, and it implies reciprocity, harmony and complementarity between roles and, therefore, fails to thematize power and inequality which are important feminist issues (Eisenstein 1984, 9-11; Stacey & Thorne 1985, 307; Connell 1987, 47-54). Further problems result from the notion of role being linked to functionalist theorizing that assumes some degree of consistency between personality, role and the institutional structure, accomplished by 'socialization' (Lopata & Thorne 1978; Edwards 1983).

As an analytical category, gender (like class) is necessarily relational: through gender (relations) two types of persons are created that are posited as mutually exclusive categories. Gender thus informs social action systems on many levels: their structured (gendered) nature, systems of meaning and the construction of subjectivities, in their mutual coordination as well as contradictions (Harding 1986a, 17-18). The fundamental task of feminist theory and research was thus to reveal how this coordination and contradiction is constituted, institutionalized, experienced, thought of and enacted in the 'everyday/everynight' world (Flax 1987, 28; Smith 1987, 49-60; Abbott & Wallace 1990, 10-11). Because gender enters into, and practically constitutes, all social relations and activities and not just the most obviously sex-related, feminist inquiry includes also the examination of any social structures and practices from the particular point of view that gender offers.

After the phase of compensatory scholarship in terms of "adding women into science", academic feminism now was more "women-centred", but for different reasons. The newly discovered 'gender', sensitized scholars to the value of women's difference from men, and new questions, categories and notions of significance were pursued which could illuminate women's traditions, their history and culture as well as their values, visions and perspectives. Women's experience was analyzed within social, cultural, historical, political and economic contexts, but more importantly it was now allowed to 'speak for itself', in its own voice (Tetreault 1985, 371-372). This did not imply one single voice; the complexities of gender as the central subject of feminist theory and research has rather implied that there is not, and can hardly be expected to be, any consensus among academic feminists on even elementary questions such as the 'essence' of gender and its relation to sexual difference (Flax 1987, 626-629; Di Stefano 1990; Butler 1990).

This stage has fed into the critique of normal or 'malestream' science in a novel way. While the type of critique in the former phase of academic feminism was based on the ideal of an absolutely neutral, unbiased knowledge to which academic feminism

sought to contribute, the new sensitivity to gender and gendering processes extended the critique also to this ideal. Gender research has abundantly shown that women's experience differs from men's. It is the latter on which knowledge claims have traditionally been founded, i.e. on experience that is "only partial and only partially understood by men. When, however, it is presumed to be gender-free - when the male experience is taken to be the human experience - the resulting theories, concepts, methodologies, inquiry goals and knowledge claims distort human social life and human thought" (Harding & Hintikka 1983, x). Unbiased knowledge would not result by identifying and then clearing away distortions in human thought. This was not possible for the reason that these 'distortions' correspond to the way the social world has been organized; they are there for good reasons.⁷ In Dorothy Smith's words, patriarchy has been written into science (Smith 1989).

3.3. Deconstruction

The focus of critique now moved to analyze the concepts and categories of science for their hidden (gendered) meanings and structural agendas - to their 'deconstruction'. And because men's, but not women's experiences, had provided the basis for existing theories (Harding 1986b, 646), this was to be followed by a further stage of feminist reconstruction in which, this time, women's experiences would be made the basis for better knowledge.

'Deconstruction' as a philosophical activity was initiated by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Deconstruction is for him a critique of concepts and

⁷ This connection explained the problems faced in trying to add women's activities and gender relations to existing theoretical discourses (e.g. Marxism and psychoanalysis) by borrowing their concepts and categories, reinterpreting their central claims or stretching the intended domains of these theories: the original discourses became distorted, but so also were the subject matters of these studies (Harding 1986b, 645-646). - Such problems are well exemplified in the Marxist-feminist 'domestic work debate' (see Molyneux 1979).

hierarchies which are essential to traditional criteria of certainty, identity and truth, but which, nevertheless, achieve their status only by repressing and forgetting other elements which thus become the un-thought, and sometimes unthinkable, within Western philosophy (Fowler 1987, 54). To deconstruct is therefore to expose and explain the achieved partiality. As a research practice it means close textual criticism in order to trace the underlying logic and inherent contradictions in the text which disturb its coherence. Derrida has demonstrated that these usually consist of a simple binary opposition such as between man/woman, subject/ object, culture/nature and that within such oppositions one side is always superior to the other side, such that there is never any pure difference without domination (Alcoff 1988, 415).

The Derridean mode of deconstruction allows hidden or repressed terms a voice within a discourse. The 'genealogical' mode of deconstruction, as presented and practiced by Michel Foucault (especially in his later works), is closer to feminist concerns in that it is directly concerned with the workings of the power/knowledge complex. The focus of Foucauldian genealogical analysis is a social formation which may be an academic discipline, a social technology it legitimates, or the form of subjectivity it induces within the form of social control it institutes. He examines - or deconstructs - the history of the formation in question from the point of view of the particular and the local power relations that in fact structure modern social forms. - More generally, the importance of deconstruction lies in trying to find out what lies behind, and at the origin of, current hegemonic concepts. It aims to answer questions such as: to what do the terms used refer, how were they generated, in response to what problems and issues did they arise, and whose interests and needs do they serve (Glauser 1990, 144). In and through deconstruction the otherwise hidden social and political processes in contemporary knowledge come into sight, knowledge is exposed as ideological or culturally constructed rather than a natural or simple reflection of reality, and the apparent 'orderliness' of that knowledge - and its 'power' on us - is questioned (Alcoff 1988; Parker & Shotter 1990). In this sense deconstruction not only

generates better knowledge; it is also necessary as a liberation from the influence and reach of unwanted power (Glauser 1990, 144).

'The family' is a notion of special significance for the study of the women's condition and a basic concept for a large field of family research as well as conventional sociology. Its orderliness has been questioned not only in academic feminism but also in other strands of academic research, initially on empirical grounds. Historical and comparative family research as well as descriptive studies of the everyday realities of family life have for some time recorded a variety of family forms or family types which could only with great hesitation be subsumed under some general concept of the family (Anderson 1979; Rapoport et al 1982). Barrett and McIntosh (1982, 81-85) conclude, after reviewing different accounts of the family, that as each author confidently describes the actual object under study, the reader is left with the impression that various authors are simply not talking about the same thing. The term 'family' covers a wide range of meanings which makes it fundamentally ambiguous.

The elaboration of gender analytics has helped feminists both make visible and criticize the sexual politics inherent in the notion of 'the family'. They have argued against views which present the family as a natural or biological phenomenon, and for the recognition of its historical, socially constructed nature. They have also argued against assumptions of 'the family' as a timeless and functional unit and for the view that families live in a complex web of economic, social, sexual and cultural relations and their coordinated arrangements. Families, therefore, always appear in multifarious forms not captured by any one 'family'. They have argued against the misrepresentation of the family as a unit because this notion conceals the multiple sites within family relationships, the diversity of experience that the family means, and the conflicts and contradictory interests that family members may have (Flandrin 1979; Barrett 1980, 187-226; Barrett & McIntosh 1982, 7-10; Thorne 1982; Edholm 1982; Coward 1983; Harris 1983; Andersen 1983, 110-141; Bottomley 1983; Rapp & Ross & Bridenthal 1983; Beechey 1985; Gittins 1985, 1-5; Abbott & Wallace 1990, 73-93).

'The family', therefore, is more a fiction than reality and, moreover, a deeply gendered, ideological construct. The proper object of family study was to be found behind the taken-for-granted phenomenon of 'the family'. In fact, if there be unity, it would be a problem to explain and not simply to assume.

New questions for family theory emerged from questioning the unitary notion of 'the family'. If family phenomena and the family itself are part of the empirical surface, and if a multitude of material and ideological structures and processes underlie them, then to theorize about the family is to theorize about these elementary structures and processes, their interrelationships and the ways in which family-identified empirical phenomena are constructed.

The first feminist 'deconstruction' of the family phenomenon in social science was accomplished by Juliet Mitchell, who wrote her 'classical' (Andersen 1983, 277) article as early as 1966 (see Mitchell 1971, 99-122). For her the family is a distinctly social construct and it is the ideology of the family that manages to represent it as a quasinnatural unit as well as giving it an atemporal quality. Mitchell dissolves the false unity of the family by what can be conveniently termed **destruction**: that is, she breaks down the family into three elementary structures which she calls reproduction, sexuality and socialization which together with the fourth structure of production form the women's position. Each structure develops separately and varies in different times and places in a number of ways; there is no automatic connection between them. Therefore, each of them also requires its own analysis.⁸

Destruction is not Mitchell's term. It is used here in order to distinguish her argument from later feminist deconstruction for the reason that Mitchell writes from a structuralist, and not a constructionist point of view. To her, 'the family' has no theoretical presence; it is merely an idea, a cultural creation (Mitchell 1971, 99). What

⁸ Mitchell's concern in the article is the position of women and the prospects of changing it. She therefore surveys the state of each of the four structures in order to be able to present a theoretically and empirically argued strategy for change.

'really' exist and, therefore, what analysts need to pay attention to, are structures. Destructuration, or the decomposition of the family into underlying structures, thus captures Mitchell's account better than deconstruction in which assumptions are also made of the actual (historical, social) process of construction.

Theoretical critiques of structuralism, genealogical studies inspired by Michel Foucault and the proliferation of cultural studies have contributed to analyses in which 'the family' has been deconstructed in the sense of revealing the false unity of the concept of the family as well as the fully social, constructed nature of family structures, values and processes (Barrett & McIntosh 1982). The specific historical, cultural and class variations in empirical family phenomena are demonstrated and traced back to the social processes, conditions and relations between various agents that have acted and interacted to construct and maintain the family structures and familial phenomena we now may observe.

Deconstruction within feminist social science stresses the need for rigorous historical studies on present familial formations: how they have been constructed, who have been involved in their making, how these agents, in terms of individual and collective actors, have interacted, what strategies they have employed and what kind of struggles have taken place between the various, often unequally positioned social agents and with what results.⁹

'The family' of sociological discourses is similarly 'made'; it, also, has its makers and genealogies of its making. The context of its origin is the historical experience of modernity. In an analysis in which visions and categories of contemporary sociological (and feminist) theory are rehistoricized, Linda Nicholson (1986) concludes that these

⁹ Feminist studies that contribute to the deconstruction of "the family" have disclosed the sociality and historicity of familial constructs such as motherhood, parenthood, mother love, marital love and "the companionate marriage" (Knibbielher & Fouquet 1977, Mathieu 1979; Lewis 1980; Brophy & Smart 1982; Métral 1981; Dally 1982; Margolis 1984; Urwin 1985; Schenk 1987; Schütze 1988; Arnup & Lévesque & Pierson 1990; Jamieson & Toynbee 1990; Cova 1991; Finch & Summerfield 1991; Marshall 1991) as well as the historical paths and social strategies of making "the modern family" (Humphries 1977; Okin 1981; Zaretsky 1982; Game & Pringle 1983; Smart 1983; Ostner 1986, 1989; Ursel 1986; Gordon 1988).

reflect unconsciously the particular era in which they were constructed - "the age of the family" - and that they carry the imprint of these historical conditions of their construction. This brings them into sharp contradiction with the feminist project of reconstructing knowledge in the present age of "after the family" (Ostner 1986).

Anna Yeatman (1986), too, considers the possibilities of theoretical reconstruction of sociology. She analyzes sociology as a discursive formation that originated with the theoretical commitment to an inclusive conception of modern social life. It has, however, failed this commitment in so far as the "distinctive world of women", variously referred to as domestic life, family life or personal life, has never been adequately integrated within its basic analytical frames. In order to see why this is so Yeatman conducts a deconstructionist inquiry into this formation. She analyzes sociology's 'classical', Parsonian and post-Parsonian phases and then concludes (Yeatman 1986, 172) that, due to dichotomous categorization that has beset sociological theory from the outset, sociology is presented as a contradictory and incoherent theoretical enterprise, and resistant to its feminist reconstruction.

3.4. Theoretical reconstruction

In a later article Yeatman (1990) continues her deconstructionist analysis and suspects (Yeatman 1990, 226), rather sceptically, that sociology "cannot change this modernist framework of reference which has governed it as a specific intellectual enterprise without abandoning its whole tradition and approach, without, that is, becoming something other than itself". Accordingly, a feminist reconstruction of sociology in toto would have few chances.¹⁰

Carole Pateman (1986, 6) similarly writes of classical social (and political) theory that it has been constructed from within a division between the public (the social, the

¹⁰ Her suggestion is that, instead, feminists begin other, "discursively and dialogically oriented modes of theorizing" (Yeatman 1990, 226).

political, history) and the private (the personal, the domestic, the familial), which is also a division between the sexes. When social and political theorists concentrate on the former sphere they cannot acknowledge that it gains its meaning and significance only in contrast with, and in opposition to, the other sphere. The patriarchal separation of the two spheres, and the sexes, has remained repressed and the theoretical treatment of the private sphere is, as if it were, a natural foundation of social and civil life, not requiring critical theoretical scrutiny. Therefore, the questions that appear problematic, and which are asked about social life, are those of the public sphere.

Thus the practices of excluding, pseudo-including and alienating women from theory and research are fundamental to the definition of what is 'social' and as such an appropriate subject of inquiry. But this definition and theorizing about the 'social' is not just a scientific practice; social theory is also a material practice - "part of the praxis of men", both of which are indicative of an agent in the oppression of women by men. Therefore, to include women alongside men, is to profoundly challenge the traditional gender divisions of patriarchal society (Thiele 1986, 41).

This most recent critical discussion within academic feminism started in the latter half of the 1980s. This time the questions centrally concern epistemology: what is scientific knowledge, from whose standpoint is the world 'known' in social science. Therefore, can there be specifically feminist knowledge, and is it possible to use a science apparently so deeply involved in distinctively masculine projects for feminist, emancipatory ends (e.g. Harding 1986a, 1987a, 1991; Haraway 1988; Hawkesworth 1989; Gunew 1990). Feminists have moved from asking 'the woman question in science' to asking 'the science question in feminism' (Harding 1986a, 29).

The question is open as to whether or not 'patriarchal' theory is ultimately subverted, however rich and exciting the inroads may have been. The common starting point is the argument that traditional social science has begun its analyses in men's experiences; it has asked only the questions that appear problematic from within the social experiences that are characteristic for (white, Western, bourgeois) men. Many of

them do not appear problematic at all from the perspective of women's experiences. Women also experience many phenomena which for them have required explanation (but have gained the necessary attention first through the efforts of feminist scholars). Thus reflection on what gets defined as problems in need of explanation reveals that a problem is always a problem for someone or other (Harding 1987, 6).

The conclusion reached is that knowledge is always founded on particular, historical social situations and that there is no "Archimedean perspective" (Harding 1991, 59) or "God's eye view" (Smith 1988) that is disinterested, impartial, value-free or detached from the particular historical relations in which everyone participates. - Feminist scholarship is thus predicated on a commitment to **perspectivism** (Gross 1986, 200): knowledge always contains a perspective from one or another location, a **standpoint** from which the world is known. The corollary of this is that the knower occupies a position - spatially, temporally, sexually and politically - and therefore can achieve only a partial view of reality from the perspective of his or her own position in the social hierarchy.¹¹ But s/he, the subject of knowledge, is never simply an individual, but an individual in a particular social situation, and in this sense it is also the social group, or category, that shares the situation (Harding 1991, 59).

Applying this for sociology, Dorothy Smith (1990b) writes that

"the theories, concepts, and methods of [sociology] claim to be capable of accounting for the world we experience directly. But they have been organized around and built up from a way of knowing the world that takes for granted and subsumes without examining the conditions of its own existence. It is not capable of analyzing its relations to its conditions." (Smith 1990b, 20)

Sociological knowledge, then, is 'situated' (Haraway 1988), and because this cannot be avoided, sociology should take it as its starting point and build it into its

¹¹ The difference between men's and women's experiences need not be understood as deriving from any essential (biological, natural, psychological) differences between men and women (male and female); rather, the difference is a social construction and has been insured by the continuance of male dominance (Harding 1987b, 26).

methodological and theoretical strategies (Smith 1990b, 22). Sociology, moreover, has "objectified a consciousness of society and social relations that 'knows' them from a standpoint of their ruling and from the standpoint of men who do that ruling". Learning to do sociology is learning how to look at society from such standpoints. It is therefore a sociology that responds to questions that "men have wanted answered" and that "all too often have arisen from desires to pacify, control, exploit or manipulate women and to glorify forms of masculinity by understanding women as different from, less than, or a deviant form of men" (Harding 1987b, 30). It is, moreover, sociology that has frequently provided welfare departments, manufacturers, advertisers, psychiatrists, the medical establishment and the judicial system with answers to questions that puzzle men in these institutions. According to Dorothy Smith's analysis (1988, 1990), this service to the 'apparatus of ruling', and to people within the relations of ruling, has been provided by transforming the actualities of everyday life into the conceptual forms ('facts') necessary for administrative and managerial forms of ruling.

An alternative sociology addresses society and social relations from the standpoint of those who are situated outside, rather than, within the relations of ruling (Smith 1988, 45-46). In reconstructing such a sociology for women, Dorothy Smith calls for a primary focus on the everyday lives and experiences¹² of actual women.

¹² The term 'experience' may mean many things. Here it refers neither to sensory data or individuals' mental relations to objects and events, nor to accumulated competences. It is more useful to think of experience as a "process in which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed. Through that process one places oneself or is placed in social reality, and so perceives and comprehends as subjective (...) those relations - material, economic and interpersonal - which are in fact social and, in a larger perspective, historical. The process is continuous, its achievement unending or daily renewed. For each person, therefore, subjectivity is an ongoing construction, not a fixed point of departure or arrival from which one then interacts with the world. On the contrary, it is the effect of that interaction - which I call experience - and thus it is produced not by external ideas, values, or material causes, but by one's personal, subjective, engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (...) to the events of the world." (De Lauretis 1984, 159).

But this is not yet enough. The analysis has to be carried on beyond listening to what women are able to tell about their lives to sociologists; this everyday knowledge has to be worked up in the form of sociology. Moreover, because the processes and relations outside women's immediate daily lives help to create the conditions of those lives and the experiences of living in those places, only a sociology that links these two is able to make society known from the point where women stand, and to explain to them how their "everyday/everynight" lives (Smith 1988) are implicated in the actual organization of the social relations of ruling. It will then not "explain" women's behaviour for others ('outsiders'); it will, instead, explore, analyze and explicate a world that women know as insiders - a feminist sociology, a sociology for women. It will also necessarily problematize the extra-local and abstracted organization of ruling as it is represented in conventional sociology. Therefore, a sociology from a women's standpoint is critical - it is an intervention in the social reality that it seeks to explain.

II. FROM MARGIN TO CENTRE

1. Invisible children

Exclusion has been the most prevalent mechanism for making children and childhood invisible in sociological knowledge. This is already predicated in the sources of sociographical information that sociologists often use: children hardly ever appear as distinct units in social statistical documentation (Sgritta & Saporiti 1989; Qvortrup 1990; Saporiti 1992). Moreover, in the cases when they are included in statistical data, they tend to be concealed in other categories that describe conditions of adults, households or institutions controlled by adults. This is 'pseudo-inclusion' as children are treated as "non-problematic dependent variables" of the adult condition and their own conditions as such or in relation to categories of adults or larger units are left outside view (Sgritta & Saporiti 1989, 110; Oldman 1992).

Exclusion and pseudo-inclusion is the general case in sociological research as well. Children are seldom treated as autonomous subjects of inquiry or as 'persons in their own right' (Thorne 1987; Leonard 1990). Barrie Thorne (1987) distinguishes three research approaches all of which consider children, but from a particular view. In the first, 'social problem' tradition, children are in focus to the extent that they are perceived as threats to adult society and its social order or as victims of adults. The threat may occur through children's wage work, delinquency, truancy, or lack of adequate adult supervision (e.g. Dingwall & Eekelaar & Murray 1984; Lopata 1984; Paterson 1988; Rodman 1988; Glauser 1990; Hendrick 1990).

More recently children have come into focus as vulnerable victims of adults, notably because of adult sexual and other abuse (Ennew 1986; Kitzinger 1990; Lubeck & Garrett 1990). This is the second research perspective, and although such violations of what is regarded as normal (and normative) childhood are important issues in themselves, the point here is on the particular view that this research presents on children's lives, activities and experiences. In addition they are filtered here through adult concerns (Thorne 1987, 89).

A similar adult-centredness dominates even the third research tradition which takes children to be novices and learners of the culture and organization of adult society. For this tradition the concept (if not always the term) of 'socialization' is foundational (Thorne 1987, 91-95; Alanen 1990; also below pp. 97-105). Its basic insight is both reasonable and compelling: children are, after all, born into pre-existing society without knowledge about its language, culture and social organization. In the process of 'socialization', they are turned into its competent members. The perspective organizes one to 'look forward' to the adult stage considered as the socially important one (Inkeles 1968, 77). The competences which children are expected to develop in the process, are those of adult social worlds and, consequently, the dimensions of progress and the criteria by which children's performance is evaluated are derived from features of the adult, the comparison being always (and unproblematically) asymmetrical. Children are made to stand in the shadows of adults - clearly an 'alienating' mode for knowing children.

There are, however, also good reasons for such a practice, for socialization is "a particularly useful topic to explore when one's concern is with what adults do when their goal is to prepare children for life in the social worlds of which adults are a part" (Waksler 1991, 1). It is, however, less capable of illuminating what children themselves

do while they are being socialized and it completely ignores other processes and activities in which children are also engaged (Waksler 1991, 21).¹

The general conclusion from such criticism is that sociological knowledge on childhood is in various ways, deeply and unreflectively adult-centred. In it an "adults' point of view" on childhood is presented that is "external to the child" (Blitzer 1991, 13). Sociologists have looked **at** but not **through** children (Blitzer 1991, 18). It is therefore (adult-)biased and partial knowledge (Goode 1986, 84; Waksler 1991, 217). Moreover, it can be claimed to be paternalistic or **adult chauvinist** (Joffe 1973) and to present an **adult ideological viewpoint** (Speier 1976). This means to say that in the same way that the bourgeoisie sets the dominant ideology of its era to its own advantage, adults have also formulated the dominant conception of children. Because adults are structurally in the position of domination, there normally arises no need to legitimate their conceptions of childhood. These are therefore also ethnocentric and missionary: judgements are, first, made by those of a dominant culture about those in a subdominant one and, second, they are used for conversion (Goode 1986, 84-5).

2. Towards child-centred analysis

The criticism of the partial and interested viewpoint and of attention being given to the concerns of adults only applies to the type of data used, the selection of research topics and problematics, the hypotheses to be tested, research methods and methodologies as well as the concepts used and theories generated in accounting for childhood. When it is accepted that children are ordinary social beings (Waksler 1991, 96), actors in the social world (Blitzer 1991, 19), subjects, human agents or persons in

¹ The concept itself is not unproblematic. Does 'socialization' refer to an empirically verifiable process or is it rather a name for an assumption made to organize a wide range of activities (Waksler 1991, 12)? - See below, chapter IV. 3.

their own right (Leonard 1990), the implication is that such partialities and limitations are arbitrary and can (and should) be overcome.

Research can be focused on children instead of centering on adults or larger units (such as households or households) who 'have' children. Children, too, have families and other things and they can be made the units of both observation and analysis of those things and conditions just as well. In fact, social statistics describing national populations in terms of housing standard, family form or poverty offer an instructive example of how views of children's actual living conditions are changed simply by making children into a statistical unit instead of the customary household or family.² Similarly, children can be "added" into sociological research proper as subjects that have not been treated as such before.

In the sociology of work, for instance, this involves taking contemporary children seriously as workers and to interpret their activities from the point of being valuable contributions within existing social divisions of labour. As a result, conventional views of the assumed 'childishness' (meaning triviality and insignificance) of children's everyday activities are challenged and both work and social divisions begin to be seen in a larger, generational perspective (see Boulding 1980; Qvortrup 1985; Solberg 1990, 1992).

In addition, completely new topics for exploration are discovered, this time on children's lives and their concerns, extending the subject area of sociological research. Frances Chaput Waksler (1991, 216-234) studies "the hard times of childhood and children's strategies for dealing with them". Her concern is with identifying and examining some of the ordinary, everyday difficulties of simply 'being a child' in relation to adults, other children and the broader social world - experiences that children themselves see as hard. The hard times of childhood thus exist when the

² The country reports of the International Project 'Childhood as a Social Phenomenon' include such conversions of statistical data e.g. on children's families. (For Finland see Alanen & Bardy 1990, 36 and 38; Alanen & Bardy 1991, 15 and 17.)

social world is seen from a children's perspective whereas adults are less prone to recognize it.³ Thus the establishing of the hard times of childhood as a social fact is sociologically significant in that it expands our knowledge of the social world.

Gaps and omissions in existing knowledge have partly resulted from the methods that have been used in research. Existing work on children has mostly been based either on laboratory experimentation and observation in clinical surroundings. In sociology the standard technique has been to use questionnaires or interviews with adults (mothers, parents, teachers). A consequence of adopting a child-centred approach is to start also taking children seriously as informants on their lives, relevances and experiences. For adult researchers doing research with, rather than just on, children, some rethinking of data collecting methods are needed (see e.g. Fine & Sandstrom 1988).

These efforts to move from an exclusionary adult perspective towards including children in sociology have also contributed to the establishment of the new Childhood Studies as a legitimate subfield within sociology. The beginning has been easiest in those traditions whose preoccupations include the social activities of everyday life and which allow for the possibility of questioning that which has previously been seen as unproblematic. In such interpretive and phenomenological branches of sociological research it has been easier to accept children as social actors and childhood as a particular kind of social reality that is created and recreated through the activities of social actors, including children themselves (Prout & James 1990, 15). It is also from these directions that the conviction could be stated, saying that "the study of children and child development is empirically and theoretically central to the discipline of sociology" (Adler & Adler 1986, 3). For sociology more generally, "adding children into sociology" has hardly accomplished more than a niche being slowly prepared for a

³ In fact, the limited adult knowledge is politically useful for them, for it "enables adults to act as they routinely do towards children, carrying out adult plans and projects in which children are included, though not necessarily as willing participants (Waksler 1991, 217).

subfield of sociological studies of childhood; the significance of childhood for the theoretical core of the discipline remains to be demonstrated.

The "additive" method will hardly prove to be the solution, either. Fortunately, however, the practice of treating children seriously, as the sociological equals to other people, is constantly implying the need of, and indicating ways for, elaborating childhood conceptually.

III. GENERATIONAL ANALYTICS

1. Childhood as a social phenomenon

The critique of adultism in the treatment of childhood in sociology has opened a space for investigations that begin from the presence of children in social life and focus on children's experiences in it. This is in itself consequential for sociology in that such critical commentary states as a fact that children are social beings and childhood is a social phenomenon, and both therefore belong to the sociological domain. The relationship between the natural and the social in childhood is posed as a problem for sociology.

Facing a similar problem some twenty years ago feminists introduced the sex/gender distinction. The conceptual distinction has served feminist analysis well; the analytical categories of academic feminism and its contributions to science at large have sprung essentially from working on this distinction (and its problems).

Such a conceptual spin is missing in studies on childhood. Admittedly, the popularization of the idea of the 'invention' of childhood since Ariès (1960) has brought home to many sociologists the idea that childhood is a historically changing phenomenon and that the institutionalization of childhood is a feature of modern societies. Therefore, the condition of children may serve as a useful indicator of societal change. And indeed progress (occasionally also regress) and "modernization" have been read from observed changes in factors such as attitudes of adults towards children, the value of children to their parents, practices of child-rearing and the recognition of children as persons (see Lenzen 1985, 16-22). Popular histories

purporting to tell the story of "children through the ages" (Greenleaf 1978) have been produced on such an understanding.

The notion has been useful in that it has at least begun to make childhood into an autonomous topic and to move it into social science. The understanding of the sociality of childhood remains, however, limited and, essentially, adult-centred in that the condition of childhood is read from the ways the adult world speaks and thinks of children or treats and values them.¹ Conceptually, the child remains a natural being that is born into a social world and lives under its manifold influence; the social is outside the child. To think of childhood as a genuinely social category would require, from the outset, that also the child side of the relationship is conceptualized as social.

Age is a characteristic that can be said to reside on the child side: every child has an age and, in everyday life, children, are routinely defined in terms of age (Boulding 1979; Hood-Williams & Fitz 1985). Its is also one of the variables that is constantly employed in empirical work in sociology. Sociologists have, moreover, theorized age-related notions such as age groups (or generations) and stratification systems based on age - although the emphasis of this kind of work has mainly been on ageing and the elderly and less on children and childhood as an age category.

Talcott Parsons, in an account of age and sex in the social structure (Parsons 1942) rightly starts from the beginning and notes that "in all societies the initial status of every normal individual is that of child". The following discussion, however, is not about childhood as a status, but about symmetries and asymmetries in treatment of the sexes as the person moves from childhood and adolescence to adulthood and old age. Age is, in fact, treated as a natural given and used to organize the exposition as

¹ This notion of the sociality of childhood works well enough for those whose practical concern is to account for observable differences (of e.g. behaviour) **among children**; it therefore speaks of childhood as it presents problems to adults.

'naturally' as it is taken to organize the course of one's everyday life.²

Diana Leonard (1990) summarizes the sociological treatment of age by saying that the category has been used without rigorous sociological definition and the problematics connected with age have not been systematized within sociology. Age continues to be seen as largely extra-socially determined by physiological differences and age relations treated as a set of groupings based on natural divisions, and not as reciprocally related, opposed and socially defined and constituted categories (Leonard 1990, 58; Hood-Williams 1990, 157).

To go beyond these limitations and to effectively 'sociologize' childhood requires the conceptual liberation of childhood from the empirical category of children (Honig 1988, 177). A similar liberation was enacted in feminist research with the introduction of the sex/gender distinction. As for doing the same in the case of childhood, problems begin already with adopting appropriate terminology: there are (apparently) no easy equivalents to sex/gender that could be used to differentiate between the social and the natural in childhood at a linguistic level - a fact that may well signal that such differentiation has not been needed or found useful in our verbal (adult) cultures.

A straightforward, albeit somewhat clumsy means for doing this is to speak simply in terms of a 'natural childhood' and 'natural children' (or offspring) on the one hand and a 'social childhood' and 'social children' on the other hand.³ Such a distinction at least expresses as a fact that childhood is not (only) a natural phenomenon and that human offspring are not automatically children. A distance is

² Similarly, Leonard Cottrell (1942) writes in the same issue about 'age & sex classes' which define social roles and require that individuals adjust to them because of membership in the given age, sex, class, caste and other social categories. Again, age appears unproblematic, but interesting because of its culturally defined implications for individual behaviour.

³ The terminological awkwardness is not equally apparent in all languages. In fact the word 'gender' does not have equivalents in many European languages. In these cases, the feminist practice has been to speak in terms of biological sex vs social sex.

created between the two and this distance allows to begin to think of childhood and its sociality autonomously from the other side and also to see the relationship of the two as a problem.

The lesson from 'gender' is that such a distinction is a useful tool in the battle against any kind (physiological, biological, psychological) of reductionist thinking which treats the difference of children from adults as simply natural. (It may, however, be that such a battle needs to be declared in the first place, and this is, of course, done by taking the idea of a social childhood to its sociological extreme!)

The first feminist use of gender was culturalist. The parallel in the case of childhood might be to say that, whatever the (social) category of childhood means, it results from cultural interpretations of some perceived conditions or features in human offspring and their inscription on 'natural' children. This follows the analogy of a building in which whatever is natural in children is the foundation upon which the superstructure of social childhood is erected. The foundation places constraints on what can be built and quite different buildings might be erected on the same foundations, according to the desire and intention of different cultural builders (cf. Plumwood 1989, 7).

Children's physiological differences as they appear in comparison to adults (beginning from size) are one obvious 'natural' feature that might become selected in adult perception as a foundation for cultural definitions of who is a child. Other possible foundations might be derived from adults' experiences of difference when interacting with human children in comparison to interacting with other adults. Cultural definitions of childhood might then be in terms of e.g. children's dependency, immaturity, verbal communication, or vulnerability. - The culturalist understanding of social childhood makes, in any case, the assumption that adults are the cultural builders and that, moreover, the characteristics and conditions in human offspring that get selected for interpretation are bound to the historical and social forms of adult-child interaction.

The variation in cultural definitions of childhood is richly described in empirical studies that survey 'models', 'ideas', 'concepts' or 'constructions' of childhood and their boundedness to place and time (e.g. Schnell 1979; Sandin 1984; Jordanova 1989; Hendrick 1990; Cooter 1992). Evidence from them is converging in showing how the more contemporary 'modern' (i.e. Western) constructions of childhood have evolved from an idea that was fragmented by both geography (urban-rural) and social class, then domesticated within the middle class family and tied to a compulsory relationship between the state, the family and welfare services, and finally universalized more or less through all social classes (see particularly Hendrick 1990). When not only the constructions themselves but also the constructors (builders) are drawn into focus, the contemporary "paradigmatic childhood" (Laflaquière 1990) is shown to be centrally linked to the larger project of modernity. Cultural definitions of childhood have had an important role here in defining appropriate forms for adult-child interaction, contributing to the professionalization of teachers, caretakers, public health and social workers and other experts of childhood (including its students) on the one hand and the familialization and scholarization of child populations on the other hand. The cultural construction of (social) childhood has thereby effected the normalization and institutionalization of the social settings and practices within which children in 'modern' societies are taken care of, raised, looked after, instructed and supervised.⁴

⁴ There are few studies that theorize the process of construction. Blum (1990), however, attempts this and claims in his (basically Durkheimian) analysis that for childhood such theorization must take place first and foremost on the level of society. This he does himself first by depicting childhood as a collective representation of a particular problem. This problem, which society needs to take into account in its own interest, is the dependency of the human child, or the fact that children need to be taken care of by adults. A certain focus of collective interest is therefore centered on the problem, generating a symbolic order of childhood in that society. It is developed by social forces as an 'economy' in the first place, but also given a political and cultural form; the social phenomenon childhood is presented as defined by such a structure.

Such research effectively historicizes the phenomenon of childhood and situates it within economic, political and cultural processes of on-going social life. From this follows that studies concerning such processes unavoidably touch upon childhood processes. Therefore, the study of childhood (as a social phenomenon) is to be conceived as an integral part of sociology in general, and not as only a new, separate section added to it.

Such conclusions associate childhood firmly with other phenomena of the social world and thereby broaden the thematic and theoretical space in which childhood is an issue. The expansion works, however, in another direction as well.

2. The generational ordering of childhood

Gender is not only different from sex; gender itself marks a difference. Through gendering two exclusionary categories of persons are created in relation to each other; 'gender', therefore, is a relational concept.

Childhood immediately offers a parallel. What childhood is and how children are understood is made sense of by relating it to understandings of adulthood and the adult. And vice versa, what is considered adult is read from what we know to be 'childlike' or 'childish'. The meanings of childhood are thus implicated in the meanings of adulthood.

Sociologists' thinking of childhood appears similarly relational. Chris Jenks (1982) makes the observation that in sociological theory the child cannot be imagined except in relation to a conception of the adult. However, "interestingly, it becomes impossible [also] to produce a well defined sense of the adult and his society without first positing the child" (Jenks 1982, 10). This is not the only interesting point in thinking about childhood. The relationship is, moreover, far from symmetrical. The child and the adult are not equally different in relation to each other; for it is the child that is

taken to instance difference and particularity in relation to the adult. This is why the problem of children appears so unproblematic to the sociological mind from the perspective of how their remarkable difference is to be integrated into a more broadly conceived sense of order and universality that comprises adult society. "It is as if the basic ontological questions, 'What is a child?', 'How is the child possible as such?', were, so to speak, answered in advance of the theorizing and then dismissed" (ibid).

'Gender' permitted feminists to reclaim such questions in the case of women and to ask them anew, now requiring an explanation for the existence of "woman". The lesson here is that the powerful, asymmetrical configuration of childhood/adulthood may also be seen as a general principle of social organization just like gender has already shown to do. It would then not only define the forms in which we are able to think about children and childhood (and, of course, adults and adulthood); it would also have to permeate through all social relations, in all spheres of social life, in social institutions and the everyday practices in which interactions within them are coordinated and social life reproduced as orderly and having its present sense.

Such a generational ordering principle can be seen functioning in the division of institutionalized spheres into 'public' and 'private'. 'Childhood' orders children into the 'private' world of home and family and out of the world of economy and politics. It also orders a child's place within the family, in relation to and in difference from its adult members. The working of such a generational order becomes usually apparent when its rules are violated, when e.g. children work for wages instead of going to school or when they disregard their obligations to their parents as a family child by taking to autonomous living.⁵ Such instances begin to make visible a **generational system** in analogy to the gender system theorized in feminist analysis: a social order composed of, but also constraining and coordinating children's relations in the social world in a systematical way.

⁵ Such violations are more commonly imputed on the parents of the child, revealing the relational nature of discourses of childhood and adulthood (parenthood).

Theorization on generational lines is beginning among feminists.⁶ Margaret Stacey (1981) looks for a conceptual framework in sociology which could be used to analyze the division of labour in a variety of social settings and social institutions, including the 'private domain'. In this domain, the home, not only women work: children, too, work and they are worked on. At this point Stacey draws explicit attention to the existence within the larger social order of a 'generational order' as one which allocates particular positions for children to occupy and links them with the positions of adult women. Such a generational order comes up as problematic when the adult woman's position in the home is analyzed. She occupies a contradictory position: in relation to her husband she is in a subordinate position, but in relation to her children the position is one of a superordinate. Stacey cites here Dorothy Smith's (1973) argument that, in the contemporary division of labour, middle-class mothers are positioned in a way that their services to their children become corrupted in their subordination to the larger social order. This begins to show, moreover, the close links that the generational system has with the general organization of social life.

The notion of a generational system as developed here implies the existence of relations of power between the systemic position that childhood means in relation to that of adulthood. John Hood-Williams (1990) argues that modern child relations are structured into an 'age patriarchy' and that contrary to much recent writing this is a central and persistent characteristic of modern childhood. It has remained remarkably traditional in that childhood still remains a firmly exclusionary status. Old concerns of obedience and respect have not become weakened or disappeared, he writes, despite the appearance of new interests such as children becoming companions to their parents or attention being given to their 'best interests'. Such concerns persist despite

⁶ The term 'generational system' has made an appearance also in a social policy context and refers then to the welfare state "contract" in which the partners are the "active" labouring generation and the retired generation; its object is the manner in which income (wages, old age pensions) is distributed. The naming of the negotiation of income distribution a "contract" and the resulting arrangement as a generational system emphasizes its cultural and political dimensions (Schürkmann et al. 1987; Kohli 1989).

the new language into which they have written, and children remain even today subject to authority relations (Hood-Williams 1990, 156; see also Fitz & Hood-Williams 1982 and Hood-Williams & Fitz 1985).

Hood-Williams (1990) discusses the generational order as he sees it within the family, "the home both of our conceptions of childhood and the most significant social relationships within which children are imbricated from birth" (*ibid*, 155).

A further instance that shows the potential usefulness of such a notion appears in looking at the manner in which childhood issues and child-adult relations have been so far dealt with both in sociology and in feminist research - that is, mostly by taking no account, and if taken, from an adult (within feminism: adult women's) perspective - and interpreting this from the generational perspective. Dorothy Smith (1988), as earlier noted, has written for feminist analysis of the "singular coincidence between the standpoint of men implicit in the relevances, interests, and perspectives objectified in sociology, and a standpoint in the relations of ruling with which sociology's objectified forms of social consciousness coordinates' (Smith 1988, 2). Women are mostly outside the relations of ruling, and are instead located in work processes that sustain the relations of ruling and are essential to their existence. Consequently, to do sociology, according to Smith, is to take on the view of ruling - organizing, managing, regulating - and to view society and social relations (including women) in terms of the perspectives, interests and relevances of men active in relations of ruling. Therefore issues that get defined as problematical or interesting (in sociology) and raise needs for knowledge are those that concern the business of ruling. As a result, the knowledge produced is in no sense false, but necessarily partial and biased.

Transplanted from gender concerns to the generational system positing childhood/ adulthood, this suggests that the child-related issues that get defined as problematical or interesting - and raise needs of and interests for producing knowledge - might be those that concern the organizing, managing, regulating, and the occasional 'modernization' of the generational system, from the standpoint of those belonging to

the hegemonic generation as well as the hegemonic gender whose business is to do the ruling. However, as the task of immediate managing of children and child care has been allocated to women rather than to men, space was made within the gender system for women to select the range of issues. Consequently the perspective from which this gets done would be that of adult women.

Although presented as two distinct systems for analysis, the gender system and the generational system hardly exist as neatly apart and autonomous. As both Margaret Stacey and Dorothy Smith have argued, women's and children's everyday work and life takes place within a dual structure and therefore it must be assumed that also their everyday/everynight experiences are both gendered and 'generationed'.⁷ Also Claudine Attias-Donfut (1988) writes, from a sociology of generations point of view (*ibid*, 114-125), about the many links that exist between gender and generational relations. In her view, mainly because sociologists' research practices have kept women invisible, these links have not become apparent and a dialogue between gender and generation has failed to arise. Moreover, although the scholarly evidence for such intersections is still meagre, she finds it convincing enough to postulate that any transformations in gender positions will unavoidably also affect generational relations, and generate transformations within them (*ibid*, 121). - It is obvious that such an approach is developing among academic feminists who argue that feminist theory needs a rethinking of childhood (see the chapter on feminism and the 'child question' above).

At present empirical evidence of intersections of gender and generation as they appear in everyday life is rare. The gender dimension of adult-child-relations has been focussed on in various contexts such as families and schools (e.g. Johnson 1988;

⁷ To make the discussion manageable I need to ignore here the presence of other powerful systems of social relations organized around class, race, ethnicity etc. Their interconnections and the diversity of experiences that they generate for women are discussed in feminism (see e.g. Sargent 1981; Hamilton & Barrett 1986). The fact that women's lives are lived also within a generational system adds to the diversity and will complicate the discussion even more.

Rothman 1989; Delamont 1976; Evans 1988) but, unfortunately, again only from their adult side, whereas ethnographers of childhood have begun to pay attention to gendering processes that affect relations among children (e.g. Thorne 1986 and 1989; Thorne & Luria 1986). Comprehensive research perspectives that would encompass both processes of gendering and generationing are still to be elaborated.

The origins and process whereby the generational system has been constructed is in need of account. The parallel question of the origins and causes of maintenance of the gender system (or patriarchy) has been endlessly debated within feminist literature, and several theoretical approaches exist (see e.g. DuBois et al. 1985, 86-125). Patriarchy, or women's subordination, dates back to prehistorical times, and the problem of finding material for its documentation is in itself huge. If an account of the 'discovery' of childhood à la Philippe Ariès is accepted to provide the origins of childhood as such (and not as one historically recent modification), material problems are diminished. However, the causes for the maintenance of childhood today need another analysis as they are not necessarily the same as the original ones.⁸

This issue is touched upon within the debate on children's rights between those who demand a comprehensive range of civil and legal rights for children and those who oppose this. The argument for more rights to children - and thus for putting an end to the legal codification of the generational system - is that the system is arbitrary and imposed on children only 'for adults' convenience' (e.g. Harris 1982). - Now, clearly these advocates of children's rights are dealing with a socially constructed generational system while denying its legitimacy.⁹ The prevailing system of adult-child relations is understood to work for the benefit of adults, the hegemonic generation, but the benefit would need to be specified.

⁸ This is the argument of Boli (1989) as he offers an explanation of the origins of one modern childhood institution, schooling.

⁹ An interest in children's rights may grow on different grounds. As Hughes (1989) writes, the interest may have very little to do with children and much to do with a critique of liberal democracies whose foundations are perceived fatally flawed so long as they permit the exclusion of any group in society from full political status and involvement.

In analyses of the social value of children it is a common argument that their (economical) value is largely gone in modern, industrialized societies and they have become economically worthless although emotionally priceless to their parents (Zelizer 1985). The idea of a generational system implies that children function not only in relation to the 'private sphere', and therefore the values they might produce would be in terms of the larger society. Jens Qvortrup (1985) argues that contemporary children do in fact contribute social and even economic values, particularly through their (unpaid) school work. Thus the change has been in the setting of their value production and not in the fact itself. School work is, however, seldom recognized and appreciated by the adult generation as proper work. This can be seen in that children's school work tends to get masked as 'development' or 'learning', which creates in turn the fiction that such 'work' means activities that either emanate 'naturally' from children as they 'grow'; or are in fact generated by adults (parents, teachers, caretakers), through the work that they do on or with children.

This kind of treatment of children's societal value and their contributions within a generational system parallels with the exploitation and control of women's work and the values they produce within the gender system.¹⁰ Feminist theory has been freed from a preassumed 'naturalness' concerning the work that women do, and particularly their reproductive work, which is based on women's special capacities as sex, or their 'property in the person' (Pateman 1988). This is work that is mostly delivered unpaid and in the private sphere of families and households. By renaming these activities as 'work', whether they are paid or unpaid, has been important in that it stresses women's agency as well as the societal significance of reproductive work. There remains then no autonomous 'nature' doing its own thing as if through women; instead we see valuable contributions which are generated within a system of unequal

¹⁰ See Delphy & Leonard (1992). A class analytic approach to childhood assumes that children and adults constitute social categories through their economic opposition to each other and through the economic exploitation of children's activities by the dominant adult class. For such an analysis of childhood, see Oldman (1992).

gender relations. - Keeping these invisible and 'natural' has benefited both the elite of the economical system (of capitalism) and the hegemonic gender (men), and has, in the end, contributed to the reproduction of the gender system.¹¹

3. Knowing children

The parallel notion of a generational system designates children as social actors with autnomous contributions within the social practices of 'modern' childhood in educational and day care institutions, families, state welfare agencies and public organizations. Children also participate in the commodity and media market as targets of influence and as consumers. They perform unpaid and paid work, and through the activity that adults designate as 'growing up' they maintain an expanding adult labour market (Oldman 1992). They also organize and participate in peer activities, creating and coordinating their autonomous cultures (Silvers 1975; Berentzen 1989). Through these and other co-ordered practices children cannot help being integrated in the social world. These practices of modern childhood designate for them social positions from which they are constrained to contribute to on-going social life. Their "membership" in society is thus not only a social construction; it is also a self-construction (Wartofsky 1983). Children's participation may well differ from that of other social categories, for instance, it may be safely assumed that the practices through which their participation is organized significantly limit children's agency compared to adults. The freedoms and limitations of 'modern' childhood are, however, an issue to be explored and demonstrated, and not simply assumed.

¹¹ It has been pointed out above (see Footnote 7, page 43) that the early feminist strategy of renaming women's activities, for instance mothering, as work, did help to display them as social and, as such, valuable contributions, but it has ultimately lead to theoretical problems. An attempt to underline the fact that children, too, contribute to social life, by leaning heavily on the category of children's work (cf. Qvortrup 1985; 1990a, 21-23), implies similar risks.

The few studies that have turned to children themselves and asked them of their experience of childhood are beginning to document such dimensions of childhood. Most of them are still, perhaps understandably, limited to descriptive accounting of the "child's eye view" on various people, relations and events of their everyday life (e.g. Goodnow & Burns 1985). It is, however, also increasingly realized that the visual fiction of "the child's perspective" may include more than just accumulated descriptions of the world as it is seen through children's eyes. What this might be, is not yet clearly seen. Some scholars propose that such perspectives will enrich the concrete facts about such concerns as child care, health and educational attainment (Bloom-Feshbach & Bloom & Heller 1982, 269. Australian family researchers (Ochiltree & Amato 1985) write, in an unusual report directed to respondents in a study, that "the child's eye view of family life" provides parents with an opportunity to see how other families are coping with children and how their own children experience family life; children can find out more about what goes on in other families, especially as regards family problems, which may help them to understand that their own problems are not entirely unique (Ochiltree & Amato 1985, 2-3).

The notion of a generational system suggests that such "enrichments" hopefully come in the form of accepting children's **experiential knowledge** of the world as serious knowledge. Children, too, are 'knowers', i.e. they have understanding of the very same world that sociologists have so far described and explained from their conventional adult viewpoints, and feminists from women's perspectives. In their everyday lives, standing in definite locations within the generational order, children come to know the world from different locations to adults. In principle, therefore, not only childhood but all of that in which (social) childhood is implicated can be known from that position. This creates a tension between adult sociology and children's knowledge of the world, a tension the sociology of childhood would need to exploit.

IV. DECONSTRUCTING CHILDHOOD

1. Concepts of childhood: towards deconstruction

Feminist deconstruction was introduced above as a critique of concepts and categories of malestream science occasioned by the problems introduced when used in feminist work; they may be found to be incompatible with women's realities and, rather than making such realities visible, conceal important issues and differences or misrepresent them. Concepts, then, are not genderless, and the aim of feminist deconstructive work is to analyze the problematical concepts in question in order to produce a better understanding of what it is in them that generates such problems and, above all, what should be done to them. Is it possible to turn them into useful categories after reformulation or specification, or should they be totally rejected and new concepts developed instead? - Deconstructive work, in this context, focuses on the hidden meanings and structural agendas that are the source of the problems that scholars may confront when taking pre-existing concepts into use for feminist ends.

Such deconstruction is beginning also within Childhood Studies. The main problem in the study of childhood has been so far the fact that the the phenomenon itself is little theorized and, therefore, there is not yet much specifically sociological to deconstruct - after all, for their concepts of childhood social scientists have tended to place their trust in the achievements of psychology or pedagogy. Critical and even deconstructivist voices have been raised regarding their usefulness within those sciences (e.g. Ingleby 1976; Wartofsky 1983; Woodhead 1990), but when sociological concepts of childhood are at issue, the benefit from this remains limited.

The first explicit attempts to deconstruct pre-existing concepts of childhood relevant to sociology have concerned notions of the child (and not childhood) and, more precisely, various 'problem children', such as 'the latchkey child' (Rodman 1988), 'the child at-risk' (Lubeck & Garrett 1990) or 'children of the street' (Glauser 1990). The questioning of such specialized concepts of the child has followed from observing the disagreement between the realities of children under study, as the researcher has come to know them, and the concept.

Benno Glauser, for instance, in his study on street children in Paraguay (Glauser 1990), was led by such observations to question the standard terms and concepts that he tried to use. They were, at the very least, imprecise - in itself an unacceptable situation from any methodological and scientific point of view (Glauser 1990, 139-140). But where does this imprecision come from? The researcher was now led to search for the hidden assumptions that those concepts seemed to contain when speaking about 'the family' and 'the child' and distinguishing between 'the home' and 'the street'. His conclusion is that a concept like 'street children' becomes necessary in response to the desire to speak about children who fall outside the frame of what is considered normal. As long as children just circulate or play in the streets or use them in any other way that is considered normal for them, there is no need for a new category. The need seems to arise first when the situation of children departs from the current social norms concerning childhood, i.e. when it is considered inadequate in the child's own interests as well as in the interests of society at large (Glauser 1990, 145).

This, again, illustrates that concepts are social constructions that arise from social needs felt by socially located actors; therefore, also, the concept is probably in close agreement with the reality of these actors, but not necessarily so with the realities of other participants.¹

¹ This underlines the practical consequentiality of concepts for the people referred to by them; they may indeed cause harm to children when e.g. international organizations, policy makers, social institutions or individuals who feel entitled to intervene in the lives of children with problems, do so on the basis of unclear and arbitrary knowledge about children's realities. A child with serious problems, for example,

Explorations like this underline the importance of asking what lies behind and at the origin of concepts of childhood that currently dominate sociological minds? Which are those concepts in the first place? How have they been generated and in response to what problems and needs? Whose problems have they been and, consequently, what interests do such concepts best serve?

The emerging research into childhood in its 'normal', everyday form, in distinction to the particular and often alarming childhoods mentioned above, has begun to address the subject matter within theoretical frames that are current in the general sociological discussion. There seems, in fact, to be an implicit argument that the insight into children's lives that specific (mostly psychological) concepts of childhood have made available is too weak, if not obsolete, to account for modern childhood expressly because they fail to address what is new in the phenomenon (see Geulen 1989b). The changes observed in childhood are named 'structural', and this is understood to mean that children are, in their everyday lives, increasingly drawn into the influence of general social processes. According to this view, the century-long (or longer) segregation of children into separate institutional and cultural micro-worlds of childhood, such as the family and school, less and less holds for childhood in the Western, industrialized world. Children have begun to relate to the rest of the social world directly, without mediation through parents, school-teachers or other representatives of the adult world. Their experiential worlds are thus beginning to approximate those of adults (Büchner 1990, 71).²

Therefore, in order to understand the significance of such changes and, particularly, their consequences for modern society, frames are adopted that help to

may be deprived of vital institutional care, protection and help only because she is conceptually left out of the definition which labels children deserving such care in his/her society. Being left undefined and even nameless may well mean being invisible to society, Glauser contends (1990, 144).

² The most extreme thesis drawn here is that childhood as a social and historical experience is becoming completely 'liquidated' and remains increasingly a mere 'fiction' (see e.g. Hengst & Köhler & Riedmüller & Wambach 1981).

locate children into those large-scale social processes. Such an interest in childhood has recently appeared most evident among German sociologists (see Chisholm et al. 1990b; Honig 1992). Interpreted within a 'modernization' frame (deriving from Critical Theory), the new observations on children's everyday lives are taken to indicate that such processes of modernity as 'individualization', 'institutionalization' and 'standardization' of living conditions and individual biography now also refer to children. The theoretical implication of this is to say that as men (of the middle classes in Western societies) were the first to step into modernity and women, after considerable time delay, have followed (see e.g. Beck 1986, 161-224; Beck-Gernsheim 1986); thus now children are seen to be joining them (Büchner 1990; Krüger, H.-H. 1990). Consequently, the concepts of modernity that are deemed appropriate for theorizing modern adult life, are also useful for accounting for modern childhood.

The modernization frame is remarkable in that it succeeds in focussing on children's role in general (and not merely familial or schooling) processes - a rare achievement within social science. By considering children the most recent entrants to a 'modern' modern (or, for other theorists, the postmodern) world, childhood becomes at last a legitimate sociological issue. - This is also reflected abundantly in the recent wave of publications on childhood, particularly in Germany.³

The fact that a social group that has been the last to remain an outsider to modernity are now becoming an insider, must be in itself consequential for both children and the theory of childhood, but surely also for the more general theory of (post)modernity. - However, before the sociological mainstream even begins to place children into such a notable position within its theorization⁴, the transportation of

³ In addition to those already referred to, see also Büttner & Ende (1989), Preuss-Lausitz & Rülcker & Zeiher (1990) and Büchner & Krüger 1991.

⁴ There are yet no signs of this. Ulrich Beck, for instance, in his analysis of modern society as a 'risk-society' (Beck 1986), mentions children only in the context of gender relations inside and outside the family. As the dynamics of individualization affect men and women the family is 'de-traditionalized' and the situation of and relationships between adult men and women destabilized. Children become, on the

childhood into sociological research under the banners of modernization theory deserves attention as to what kind of conceptualization of childhood it makes available.

The feminist reception of modernization theory provides useful guidance for also deconstructing childhood as it is constructed within that theory.

Ilona Ostner (1986, 1989) has pointedly written of some of the problems following from 'adding' women into modernization theory. This addition gives the understanding that as individualization advanced beyond men and began to reach women, the latter were now constrained to stand "on their own two feet". Women, too, now have to practice strategic rethinking in relation to their various obligations. As a consequence the relations of caring within family, kin and neighbourhood, which have been predominantly maintained by women, have begun to weaken and to lose significance. The family has begun to dissolve, which is shown in the increase of numbers of divorce and remarriage (leading to a "jungle of parental relations") as well as of people living alone (Beck 1986, 163-165) and the single person is becoming the basic, or paradigmatic, figure of the thoroughly modernized society (ibid, 199).

Such a modernist narrative assumes, quite simply, that there once was a beginning, and that "in the beginning, there was 'the family'" (or some other community or network), which was both stable and fixed. Also in the same beginning, there was 'the woman' - an equally stable and fixed figure in this argumentation (Ostner 1989, 44). Ostner then challenges this story by introducing women's realities, and finds that the story provides a case of highly abstract, unhistorical reasoning. The history of women's modernization has been different; the universal story therefore fails.

one hand, obstacles for (women's) individualization. But on the other hand, they also now become priceless and irreplaceable in that they represent "the last irredeemable primary relationship" in a world in which partners come and go (Beck 1986, 193).

In order to assess the failures, but also the possible usefulness of the modernization frame from the point of women, Ostner (1989, 45-60) begins to deconstruct 'the family' of that frame by presenting an account of the coming of the modern (German) family as a historical, class-bound and gendered phenomenon. In it, 'the family' appears not so much as the beginning of modernization but as a result of an already achieved social differentiation. The process, moreover, continues. It was, however, at this historical (but also transitory) stage - the "Age of the Family" (see also Nicholson 1986) - in which men began to 'differentiate' (in Simmel's terms) and to develop a separate social individuality - all this being based on the achieved state of 'the family'. Thus, as Ostner (1989, 55) argues, 'the family' has functioned as the medium for men's individualization which, however, seems to be noted nowhere in theories of modernization. Moreover, the case of women's individualization is different, and this has also not been recognized in those theories.

The difference is not predominantly in women's later entrance into modernity; the social and historical conditions of women's individualization are also different. Most notably, for women, 'the family' no longer exists for them to rely on as the basis for developing their identity, as it once did for (some) men. Women thus enter modernity in an age "after the family" (Ostner 1989).

The lesson from such critical reading of the modernization study is that the process is a gendered one and, therefore, the concepts of modernity as they have been elaborated may be appropriate for men's experience of modernity but not nearly so for women's.⁵ Not much more deconstruction is needed beyond this feminist analysis of 'modernization' in order to also question the thesis that children are merely latecomers to modernity; this assumption is also based on abstract and unhistorical reasoning that does not allow to consider the genderedness and 'generationedness' of the social structures of modernity.

⁵ Feminist discussions on the literature of modernity generally converge here and claim that theories of modernity tend to account for the experiences of men but not of women and that the source of such a bias is, once again, in its gender-blind, androcentric conceptualization. Deconstruction of such concepts is needed for a feminist sociology of modernity to emerge (see e.g. Wolff 1985; van Vucht Tijssen 1990).

Empirical research on childhood and reflections on observations of what is taken to be 'modern childhood' have been so far mainly a (West) German phenomenon; there seems to be clear "national differences in emphasis" (Chisholm et al. 1990b, 5, 11; Honig 1992). The editors of "Childhood, youth and social change" (Chisholm et al. 1990b) cautiously suggest that such differences might derive from real national differences in the 'institutionalized' terms of childhood. Further research on such terms should then help to clarify the situation. The more pertinent question here is whether the modernization frame is adequate for conceptualizing childhood at all. After all, Ostner's deconstructivist account for the women's case, demonstrated its blindness to the 'institutionalized terms' of gender and, by analogy, of generation. Gill Jones and Claire Wallace (1990, 137) also conclude, in their assessment of the modernist theory of individualization as a theory of social change, that it is not applicable to young people in general, exactly because it ignores such vital 'institutionalized terms' of youth (and childhood) as they are determined by social class⁶, gender⁷ and, they add for Britain, ethnicity.

The tentative conclusion here is that the modernization approach, although the first to thematize (modern) childhood within a general theory of social change, fails in the end because of the ways it formulates the problem of childhood. In some formulations, childhood is a family phenomenon requiring no independent conceptualization of its own. In other formulations (as they appear particularly in empirical studies on children) 'childhood' is essentially the process of growing up and the question then is, how this might be linked to societal modernization (Honig 1992,

⁶ This ignorance is a theoretically argued case in 'critical' modernization theory, and not simple negligence (see Beck 1986, 121-160; Berger & Hradil 1990; applied to childhood: Büchner 1989). In accordance with this, empirical studies into childhood within such a frame focus on the life situations, life styles and life courses of children and conclude that 'modern' biographical patterns appear already in childhood (Büchner 1990).

⁷ See the critique by Ostner above. It is also worth noting that the German contributions dealing with gender and class inequalities (Krüger, H. 1990; Engler 1990) are also among the critics of modernization theory as applied to children.

171). 'Growing up' translates into the sociological concept of 'socialization' and thus the sociological studies of modern childhood as they have been pursued are about the changed conditions of socialization (e.g. Geulen 1989a; Büchner & Krüger 1991) or, alternatively, about the results of socialization in terms of both 'forms' of socialization and 'types' of outcomes in the process (see e.g. Baethge 1989).

The conclusion is that the concepts of childhood that are accepted without questioning as valid constructions, derive from the two 'classical' sociological discourses of **socialization**, on the one hand, and **family**, on the other. In relation to these, the lessons that have already been learned by deconstructing 'the family' from a gender point of view, suggest that such lessons be extended to a generational analysis as well. A deconstruction of sociology's family discourse, this time from a generational point of view, should produce a clearer vision of 'where the children are' (Thorne 1987) within sociology's way of knowing the social world.

Neither should it be taken for granted that 'socialization' defines, names and signifies best the component of social reality that is specifically children's, as the sociological literature (see pp. 1-25) leads us to believe. Feminist lessons apply even here and submission of the socialization discourse to analysis for its hidden generationed meanings is now seen to be required.

2. The socialization discourse of childhood

2.1. A most classical concept

A particular idea of children's place in social life was formulated as early as in the classical age of modern sociology (see below) and presented since then through the concept of socialization. The idea itself is, however, even older than sociology's founding period. Dieter Geulen (1980) traces the roots of socialization paradigms in

classical Greek philosophy and follows through the philosophy of the Enlightenment and idealism up to the dialectical and evolutionary discourses of the nineteenth century. Chris Jenks (1982b) also finds the idea to be present in social theory "from the earliest Socratic dialogues onwards" (ibid, 9) as a long tradition in which social theorists have systematically endeavoured to constitute a view of the child that is compatible with their particular vision of social life. This view, he contends, has been purposively constructed so as to support and perpetuate "the fundamental grounds and versions of man, action, order, language and rationality" in those theories (ibid, 23). The resulting constructions, Jenks argues, contain a paradox in that the child of social theory remains "familiar to us and yet strange; s/he inhabits our world and yet seems to answer to another, essentially s/he is of ourselves and yet appears to display a different order of being". It is the child, then, that is considered particular and different in relation to "us" and, therefore, "we" can be defined, ourselves, in terms of the child's difference to us. The concept of 'socialization' inscribes this understanding of childhood into social theory in that it expresses the attempt to integrate this experience of difference into a general theory of social order.

The paradox contained in this construction has remained unacknowledged and therefore also unsolved for social theory. The 'child side' of the relationship has been filled with mere 'difference', which means that it is left empty, without any substantial positive definition, and the focus has moved onto the process of how this difference is overcome. The overcoming is formulated through some concept of socialization and, indeed, in social science, has concentrated on theorizing the many aspects of "the integration of the child into a social world". In summary, the child is **negatively defined** in social theory: not by what the child is, but instead by what s/he is **not** and by what s/he is subsequently going to be. In other words, the child is depicted as pre-social, potentially social, and becoming social.

The idea contained in 'socialization' is certainly compelling (Thorne 1987): born without language or knowledge of social organization, children do become inducted

into the social worlds that surround them. But for Thorne as well as others (e.g. Speier 1976; Waksler 1991, 3-4) frameworks based on socialization also present an obstacle for understanding childhood.

Jenks (1982b, 10) presents the basic problem in the following way:

"It is as if the basic ontological questions, 'What is a child?', 'How is the child possible as such?', were, so to speak, answered in advance of the theorizing and then dismissed. To take an analogy, just as the early anthropologist, a self-styled civilized man, 'knew' the savage to be different from himself and thus worthy of study, so we also, as rational adults, recognize the child as different and in need of explanation. Both of these positions proceed from a pre-established but tacit ontological theory, a theory of what constitutes the difference of the Other, be it savage or child. **It is these unstated modes of theorizing, these tacit commitments to difference**, that give rise to the routine definition of the savage or the child as a 'natural' meaningful order of being. Such **implicit theories** serve to render the child-adult continuum as conventional for the modern social theorist, as the distinction between primitive and rational thought was for the early anthropologist. Such social hierarchies are taken for granted in our thinking because we do not examine the **assumptions** upon which they are based. These assumptions embody the values and interests of the theorist, which in turn generate normative models of the social world. In this way children and savages alike are excluded from the analysis or reimported as an afterthought." (Jenks 1982b, 10; emphasis by L.A)

The implication is that the untheorized child will be recovered only through examining such modes of theorizing, tacit commitments, implicit theories, assumptions and beliefs. Jenks offers his "Sociology of Childhood" (1982a) as an anthology of a number of influential texts on children and childhood for the reader to deconstruct.⁸ This is, for him, the research programme for the sociology of childhood: it is through an understanding of the "constitutive practices that provide for the child and the child-adult relationship" that childhood, in sociology, can be known (Jenks 1982b, 24).

⁸ Jenks himself begins such a deconstruction from Piaget and Parsons, analyzing their texts in order to determine how these theorists have constituted the child, signified him/her and placed him/her within their larger *order* of social life (Jenks 1982b, 15-23).

2.2. The career of 'socialization'

Both the term and the concept of socialization emerged originally as a corollary of the concept of society, in an age when arguments for a separate scientific discipline of sociology were being advanced (Clausen 1968, 4; Geulen 1980, 31-33; Wentworth 1980, 14-15). Durkheim, who is considered the founding father of the term (Hurrelmann & Longin Priebe 1977, 175), takes 'socialization' to refer to social forces that make social life possible by drawing individuals together into a community.⁹ As such, it is a reality in its own right, or in the words of Durkheimian theory, a reality *sui generis*, which means that it is to be treated as a social fact residing at the level of society, separate from any possible effects that it might have at the level of individuals.

The emergence of socialization was then the emergence of a genuinely sociological category, which was first adopted (by Durkheim) into the vocabulary of a realist sociology (Johnson & Dandeker & Ashworth 1984). This sociology - contrary to empiricist and subjectivist sociologies which later were to dominate the use of the term as well as research on socialization - insists on social phenomena being things in themselves, outside and independent of all those elements that make them up, such as individuals, their particular circumstances and consciousness. The social reality of socialization was evident in its constraining effect on individuals, as they internalize social facts originally external to and independent of them. Socialization was thus

⁹ In effect Durkheim constructs the term through extensive elaboration of the social functions of education, i.e. "the means by which society prepares, within the children, the essential conditions of its very existence" (Durkheim 1956 [1911], 71). The function of education in society is "to arouse in the child: (1) a certain number of physical and mental states that the society to which he belongs considers should not be lacking in any of its members; (2) certain physical and mental states that the particular social group (caste, class, family, profession) considers, equally, ought to be found among all those who make it up. Thus, it is society as a whole and each particular social milieu that determine the ideal [of man] that education realizes." (ibid, 70) Because, according to Durkheim (ibid, 71) this object of education is achieved through "the influence exercised by adult generations on those that are not yet ready for social life", he arrives at a final definition of education as "a methodical socialization of the young generation" (ibid, 71).

taken (by Durkheim) to be a genuinely social process, which nevertheless had secondary effects through internalization, a psychological process.

The original and developing concept of socialization, moreover, embodied a strong moral sense: the society in which the forces of socialization are in effect is a civilized one, meaning one in which the originally unsocial human nature is gradually superseded. Moreover, the civilized society proves to be the society of adults, and Durkheim himself is quite clear about this: socialization is, after all, exercised on "those that are not ready for social life" (Durkheim 1956 [1911], 71) because "the child, on entering life, brings to it only his nature as an individual. Society finds itself, with each new generation, faced with a *tabula rasa* very nearly, on which it must build anew" (ibid, 72)

The original concept of socialization thus contained the assumption of the fundamental polarity of human nature between an uncivilized, unsocialized side and a civilized and socialized side. Here the child was "naturally" located on the uncivilized side, as a being yet to be socialized by social forces.

Socialization is originally linked to sociological analysis through the idea of a reality residing on the level of the social and exercising a determining influence on individuals - an idea that later was named sociological determinism. However, sociological determinism within a realist sociology is different from sociological determinism transplanted to other sociologies. The shift in the meaning of socialization during its career exemplifies this. The term emerged as an entirely different concept as it was being included in the pragmatistic and individualistic as well as increasingly empiricist research in the United States of the 1920s and 1930s (Clausen 1968, 20-31, 48-50; Geulen 1980, 41-44; Wentworth 1980, 13-61). The essential change in the term was its reinterpretation as referring to the (psychological) process of internalization. The social reality that Durkheim spoke of came to be reduced to external conditions providing a milieu for the drama of socialization-as-internalization. This left, for the research of socialization, the task of accounting for the process whereby society as the

social and cultural environment in which children are born and grow up, is an external given and makes the contents that are internalized, and thereby reproduced.

Such a shift in the fundamental meaning of socialization has been paradoxical for sociology, as it has, essentially, removed the whole concept out of its domain to that of psychology. Nevertheless, it was this transformation that led in the 1950s and onwards to the emergence of the research tradition of specific studies on socialization. Talcott Parsons, finally, gave this development a theoretical legitimation by building the notion of socialization-as-internalization into his theory of the social system (Parsons 1951).¹⁰

2.3. Critique and deconstruction

The most evident feature of the present-day notion of socialization is what Speier (1976) calls "the adult ideological viewpoint", stressing the exclusive power of adults to define children. Within the socialization framework the place of 'adults' can be occupied by a variety of actors, depending on the context under study, and being an adult need not be their common denominator. More significant is the fact that they share a structural position of power in relation to those undergoing socialization (here, children). There are thus grounds for renaming the viewpoint an *elitist perspective*. This means that the process of socialization is essentially looked at from the viewpoint

¹⁰ For Parsons socialization is a childhood phenomenon located, first and foremost, in the family where it is mediated first by the child's relationship with his/her mother and then expands to include the evolving relationship with the immediate intra- and extra-familial environment (see Menzies 1976, 90-109; Long & Hadden 1985, 40). In this conception of the location of the socialization process, Parsons clearly differs from Durkheim for whom the family was hardly unable serve as intermediary between the individual and the collectivity (Aron 1967, 40). This difference may be understood to result from the difference in their theorization about socialization; for Parsons socialization takes place through internalization and this, in turn, he sees as taking place through identification (here he is following Freud's theory of child development; see Menzies 1976, 94-98; Friedrich 1977; Geißler 1979; Wentworth 1980, 22-27). - For a general interpretation of the legacy of Durkheim in theorizing about socialization and Parsons's relationship to it, see Muench (1981).

of the institutions and organizational apparatuses of 'society' (or their representatives), which in the interest of reproducing themselves, exercise influence on children in order to produce in them outcomes conducive to that reproduction.¹¹ - It is easy to see here that the other side of the elitism coin is functionalist thinking.

The inherent elitism and functionalism of this viewpoint seems quietly and smoothly to bypass the intentions and interests of other possible participants in the process of socialization - especially of those most concerned, children - assuming, perhaps, that these would (if they could know them) converge with those of the elites. This helps to model children merely as passive objects and victims of influences external to them, unable and unwilling to resist. Bypassing children as co-actors in their own socialization implies, moreover, that any outcomes of the process can be accounted for merely by referring to constraints in children's environments, on the input side or what is "done" to children.¹²

A further feature on the socialization perspective on childhood - reflecting its inherent elitism and particularly its forward looking implication - is its focus on the outcomes of socialization at the expense of the process itself. Out of all possible outcomes observation is only made of those that are expected, intended or desired by the actors and constructed as instigators of socialization in the first place. Such an outcome-centeredness maintains two further limitations within the framework. First, despite frequent mentions of concern for the process, it is in fact remarkably neglected in actual research. This is made evident by the methods most often applied: techniques of correlating environmental conditions and outcomes (inputs/outputs) dominate, leaving the process inside a black box.

¹¹ Inkeles (1968, 76-77) writes that, because socialization is "the process where a person acquires the attributes that will characterize him in the next stage of his development", it is inherently "forward looking". Moreover, what it particularly looks forward to is "the personally relatively enduring and socially important adult stage".

¹² Inkeles (1968, 77) equates this with the *process* of acquiring the "characteristics of the next stage" (emphasis in the original).

Second, the exclusive attention paid in research to outcomes intended or desired by elites necessarily brings about a systematic neglect of any other outcomes. The possibility that children as participants might contribute something themselves is dismissed by elitism from the beginning. This perspective also works against noticing any conflicts or contradictions in the process or any outcomes that might partly refute those expected by elites. Functionalist presumptions are in effect, giving rise to an overly harmonious view of socialization.¹³

The most serious simplification of the socialization perspective concerns the process itself. Many scholars talk about the socialization process, but it is rarely specified exactly what that might be conceptually (Long & Hadden 1985, 39). Moreover, from what has been said above it is clear that what is commonly taken to be the whole process of socialization is at the most one part of it, namely the part best conceived of in psychological terms and theories. Socialization-as-internalization continues to monopolize the discourse of socialization. The ample reservoir of psychological theories available to account for it also renders it difficult for students of socialization to even notice that this is a basic deficiency, that the 'classical' definition of socialization depicted it as a *social* process.

The omissions, simplifications, distortions and misrepresentations of childhood in and through the conventional socialization discourse may in fact crystallize within this basic deficiency. Its reconstruction would, then, also begin by returning 'socialization' back to the social domain.

¹³ Everyday observations confirm that socialization is not always "successful" and intended or expected outcomes may fail to appear. Such observations might open the possibility for conceptual rethinking of the process. It may also fail to do so: the socialization framework, in fact, makes it possible to adjust such observations within the framework with no change or challenge, simply by redefining the agents that in such cases have effected 'deviant socialization'.

2.4. Making socialization social

The assumptions of determinism, linearity, functionality and harmony in the process of socialization, its reduction to internalization and its outcome-centeredness have all been observed and criticized within the research tradition, but mostly in a piecemeal fashion. (Long & Hadden 1985). The assumption of functionality in socialization has proved to be, if not entirely false, at best a partial truth. Empirical studies carried out with sensitivity to the everyday context make visible even other phenomena besides those regarded as conducive to the reproduction of society's institutions and structures and included in the conventional wisdom of socialization. Certainly they also include contradictory effects and results that cancel each other out, making the outcome of socialization much more complex.

It seems that the limitation easiest to fight against in the socialization perspective is its unchallenged commitment to the viewpoint of elites. Research methods exist and studies of groups of young people have been made that give a voice to such categories that have usually been kept silent in research, generating more democratic and complete descriptions of the experience of socialization (e.g. Willis 1978). Such studies also help to produce evidence of the competences of children, even small children, in constructing their everyday social relations (Goode 1986; Mandell 1984; Waksler 1986), and break the illusion of childhood as a completely vulnerable state. This in turn may contribute to seeing children in a new light, not only as objects being primarily acted on even if this is largely true for children in most places and most of the time, but as **social actors** who act even when positioned unequally in relation to other (more powerful) groups in everyday social life.

Ethnographic, phenomenological or cultural analyses of children's lives also help to reconsider the notion of socialization as researchers admit that the assumption of linearity, that is, the assumption that socialization necessarily results from given preconditions, must fail. Instead, if the processes involved are genuinely thought of as **social processes**, degrees of autonomy will have to be granted to them.

This shift in perspective implies that children should be viewed as social actors and agents of their own life. It is methodologically wrong for researchers to consider children as inherently passive objects or victims, no matter how much children appear to be victims in their various real-life situations. The nature of children and childhood should be considered in the context of ongoing theoretical debates about the relationship between social action and social structure (Burns 1986; Hindess 1986). Childhood will be moved from its conventional microworld of family, school and significant others, and placed into the terrain of central theoretical concerns in sociology. This implies the consideration of childhood in structural terms (Qvortrup 1985).

To see children as social actors has far-reaching implications for the socialization perspective itself; it threatens in fact the whole idea of socialization, as it forces sociologists to reconsider socialization as a process within their theoretical and conceptual domain. This point has been addressed in scientific literature only recently (Wentworth 1980; Long & Hadden 1985). Dieter Geulen (1987) tackles the problem by suggesting that socialization research and developmental psychology, while sharing a concern for analyzing and explaining human development, display opposing strengths and weaknesses. The socialization approach is increasingly recognized to have a deficient understanding of process, whereas various schools of developmental psychology stress this aspect. For some researchers the socialization tradition, a reliance on the more elaborated psychological concepts of process, for example theories by Piaget or Erikson, has appeared as the solution to their problem. Geulen however demonstrates the inadequacy of this.

Geulen critically examines this solution and arrives at a different conclusion. According to him, the two theoretical traditions, at least in their present stage, resist theoretical integration. Geulen's main argument here starts from the role of external or exogeneous conditions for developmental processes as they are given in theories in the developmental tradition. According to Geulen (1987, 10-12) the question of their

role in fact never comes up, with the consequence that this tradition of thinking remains based on the assumption of an endogeneously induced process where external conditions merely function as catalysts. This contradicts the results of socialization research that increasingly emphasize the historical contingency of developmental processes, thus stressing both the multitude of social conditions and the variability of possible developments. These conditions as well as historically variant developmental processes need to find expression in the concept of socialization. The problem thus remains of how to do it. There are logical limitations for such an integration of the two perspectives, and the resulting eclecticism cannot be accepted. The problem of how to conceptualize socialization as a process therefore remains.

The difficulty seems to lie in the recognition that socialization is in fact a social process. The problem then is a theoretical one and resists piecemeal solutions. A return to Durkheim's original notion of socialization will hardly provide a satisfying answer; his work, however, provides inspiration for such a project (see e.g. Bhaskar 1979, 117-121). The criticism leveled against the way children are treated on the socialization perspective, however, suggests that the issue should be rethought along avenues established in other areas of social science. As the conventional notion of socialization has tended to objectify those undergoing socialization, approaches that stress agency seem more promising. And as socialization, furthermore, has tended to center on outcomes of an individual or psychological nature, approaches stressing the socially constructed nature of social order bring forth social relations, structured social interaction, institutionalized social practices and shared, but also contested, meanings as not only outcomes of socialization but essentially constituting it. By integrating such aspects into a new understanding of childhood a genuine **social construction** might emerge. In any case, it presents the possibility of reconstructing a sociological perspective that will begin to 'know' childhood from the place where children stand.

Such a place, according to another sociological discourse of childhood, is most probably within the family.

3. Childhood and the family

3.1. Hidden in the family

'Socialization' and 'the family' are interrelated concepts. Through 'socialization' the family is defined as the primary locus of childhood and a view is constructed in which it is 'natural' that children are born into families, live in families and grow into the larger social world from within families. For every child there is, moreover, a family of 'his/her own' - so naturally the other settings in which children might have to stay for shorter or longer periods are specified by also adding a familial attribute to them, and they become e.g. foster families or stepfamilies. Finally, in a time when the family as a stable structure of adult life is no longer self-evident, the reality of the family is not nearly so likely to be questioned in the case of children: such is the power of 'socialization'.

This power obviously derives from the discursive construction of childhood, family and socialization into a solid matrix of significations that resists its breaking into parts for separate consideration (Alanen 1988, 54-55; Prout & James 1990, 23-24). The questioning of any one component, for example the family, as the setting in which children grow up, takes place within accepted notions of the other two, which makes it difficult to even imagine novel relations between the three components. This can be seen, for instance, in the way that changes towards more diversified 'family forms' and 'nontraditional lifestyles' tend to be discussed: any possible 'effects' of such new family arrangements on children are evaluated against the accepted knowledge of childhood and socialization, that is, knowledge of a particular version of the family.

This version is the 'classical' account of the family and how it has changed (Jamieson 1987; Stacey 1990). It tells us that as capitalism matured a modern occupational structure was established, household strategies as well as value systems changed to suit the gendered wage earning economy and an encroachment of the state

in all areas of social life began. This was the birth place of the modern nuclear family as a social unit. It emerged with a distinct gender and generational structure and clear boundaries that closed it from the outside public world. A new kind of interest in and devotion to children developed and the emotionally intense life inside the family now centered around the child. This familialization of children generated modern childhood as a social practice, i.e. the discursive construction of childhood as a family phenomenon and its practical implementation into a dependency position within generational family relations.¹⁴

The determinants and the timing of this change and the links of the family to larger social processes have been understood in different ways, but the general contours of "the making of the modern family" (Shorter 1975) has gained an almost taken-for-granted truth value within general sociology. Therefore, whatever diversity in households and familial relationships has been found, such findings keep being interpreted according to this story.

3.2. Reflections from the age of the family

Only recently has the power of the story as a whole began to break. It has been historized in the hands of family historians (e.g. Mitterauer & Sieder 1982; Netting & Wilk & Arnould 1984; Medick & Sabeian 1988; Mitterauer 1989) and the anthropological assumptions on which the story has been founded have been deconstructed in a critical light (e.g. Collier & Rosaldo & Yanagisako 1982; Cornell 1990). Finally, through feminist deconstruction (see pp. 43-48), its gender bias has been

¹⁴ The literature on "the family and modern/industrial/capitalist society" is huge; this is, after all, the founding theme of the long-established section of family sociology. For its beginnings and development in Europe and Northern America, see e.g. Howard (1981), van Leeuwen (1981) and Montgomery (1988). Morgan (1975), Harris (1980; 1983), Segalen (1981) and Anderson (1986) offer general accounts of the state of the art; Bottomley (1983a) is an assessment of it from a feminist perspective. Bottomley (1983b), Gittins (1985) and Elliott (1986) are some of its recent critiques, all from a gender perspective.

disclosed, showing that as a whole, and in its details, the story speaks of the activities, experiences and relevances of some social actors and excludes others, that is, it speaks of the family phenomenon from a particular standpoint (Ostner 1986). The validity of its central concepts as means for useful knowledge about family phenomena must, therefore, be limited to the historical period and the structural location which are contained in the standpoint in question.

This historical period has been identified as the "age of the family", as Linda Nicholson (1988) calls the bygone classical time of radically modernist thinking (which includes the birth of sociology). And the locations from which the modern (including the family) has been experienced and articulated is, as Ilona Ostner (1989) has begun to show for Germany and Judith Stacey (1990) for North America, that of a social category of (white, Western, middle class) men.

From this standpoint, the **familialization** of childhood meant the reordering of filial relationships along the axes of both gender and generation into 'his/her' private unit, now structured by two (gendered) positions of parenthood and the corresponding position of the (dependent) child. From this standpoint, also, the family began to appear as an entity that was related to other social units (institutions) essentially through the father/husband. Together such units seemed to constitute the fabric of modern social life which was kept in motion through the public activities of the heads and representatives of families, while the 'private' life was left to women and children (and other dependents in the household) leading an everyday life as if behind the stage of the actual drama.

From such a standpoint, children's everyday realities could not achieve representation in public beyond "the family" (represented by its head). "The family" also therefore functioned as the most adequate notion of the time for presenting that particular reality in the sociological discourse.

This construction of childhood and the knowledge of child life that is based on it has since then been built into the various professional discourses and social practices

of modern welfare states; it has become the institutional way of thinking about and acting on childhood. Contemporary institutions of childhood - family, school, day care, health and welfare institutions etc. - function according to that knowledge and, moreover, such ways of thinking about children also produce self-conscious subjects - teachers, mothers, care-takers, but also children - who think and feel about themselves through the terms of those ways of thinking (see Prout & James 1990, 23-26). Thereby the way of knowing childhood in terms of the family becomes self-validating and makes it difficult to view children in any other way.¹⁵

3.3. Towards reconceptualization

Suggestions for such visions as well as new approaches for learning to know childhood better can, however, be found again in feminist scholarship. Its commitment to begin from the vantage point of women's experiences instead of concepts that have hidden those experiences (see pp. 43-48), is generating research that takes up aspects, features and matters in the family phenomenon that have appeared transitory and marginal in relation to the normal case presented by "the family". Feminist scholars have refused to consider, for instance, the experience of women who are single, lesbian, or feminist mothers, or divorced, or live without husbands, merely as deviant or deficient cases of "the family" (Hanscombe & Forster 1981; Jools 1983; Gerstel 1988; Martiny 1989; Gordon, T. 1990; Chandler 1991); seen in the context of gender relations such new forms of living come to be seen as resulting from choices that women have made, albeit often in very constraining and not self-chosen conditions. In this research,

¹⁵ For Dorothy Smith (1988) this is characteristic of knowledge in modern society in general and is explained by the fact that the modern school, family and childhood have evolved as the contemporaries of the modern Western society, its typical social structure of classes and the state and, significantly, its institutions of administration, management and polity. These have emerged within the same processes and have developed into a network of institutionalized social relations that mutually enforce and condition each other. The social sciences, also part of the same project, are the institutionalized forms of producing knowledge of the social.

women are seen as **actors**, but not only in their own (and their children's) lives. The accumulating effect of such choices is societal in that through their 'new' forms of living women put pressure on the institutionalized practices of the family sphere and its relationship with other institutions. They come to be seen as veritable initiators and executors of social change - as social actors in their own right (Martiny 1989).

Such an **agentic** approach (Davies 1990) is also needed for bringing children out of "the family" in which mainstream sociology has placed, and left, them. Family research with such an approach would focus on children's activities in their everyday life of which family (in Western societies) is a part. But it would not take 'family' for granted; it would rather explore its place and meaning in children's everyday life. From the basic feminist tenet that family experiences differentiate according to gender and generation (Thorne 1982, 10-16) follows also the basic conviction that family is different for children from what it is for the adults of even the 'same' family. It is yet too early to see what reconceptualization of family will follow from knowing the difference; studies of family from a children's perspective have to materialize first.

The research of feminists into changing gender relations in family and working life as well as in the public sphere more generally unavoidably touches upon generational relations. They are, therefore, both interesting and relevant for generating better knowledge of modern childhood. Therefore, although researchers generally discuss their empirical results and theoretical conclusions only in a gender perspective, it is useful to try to read and to repossess them in a generationally focussed frame.

Studies on 'post-divorce' families with children are one case in point. As Jacques Commaille (1983, 1987) writes, divorce should not be seen just as a "broken contract", a break or an irreversible disadjustment but as a phase which makes explicit the otherwise hidden elements of "the family". Thus, paradoxically, "the family" is best studied when it is in the phase of dissolution¹⁶ and fragmenting into its constituent elements (Commaille refers to such elements as power, negotiations, rivalries, stakes).

¹⁶ It therefore also makes the privileged object of a 'political sociology of the family' (Commaille 1987).

Monique Buisson and Jean-Claude Mermet have studied the different ways in which a number of French couples with children reorganize and articulate their mutual relationship following divorce (Buisson & Mermet 1986a, 1986b, 1988). They distinguish three forms of logic operating among the couples, each of which leads to a different configuration of post-divorce familial relations. The first configuration which they identify, in fact preserves the family as it was, as a shared domestic space and a familial intimacy with clear boundaries between its privacy and the public world - the essence of "the family" reconstructed. The second logic dissolves the common "nucleus" but preserves the extra-familial social network of the pre-divorce situation. It is in relation to this social context (composed of relations to neighbours, friends, colleagues, kin, school and other institutions) that the divorced couple needs to define and articulate their mutual relationship and their identities. This construction of post-divorce *famialité* (familiality) differs from "the family" most clearly in that the distinction between public (social) and private (familial) becomes blurred. In the third configuration the spousal relationship is completely dissolved and the mutuality of the couple remains only through the parenthood of each: this *famialité* is limited to parental projects centering on children (and particularly their schooling).

The three post-divorce situations, ranging from the modern familiarity form of the 'classical' nuclear family to the 'postmodern' family (Lüscher 1988; Stacey 1990), were found by analyzing the familial practices of the adult couple as they passed through divorce. The focus on adults in this study followed from its central purpose to investigate parents' post-divorce custody arrangements; the authors recognize that also other familial relationships could have been chosen to structure the analysis (Buisson & Mermet 1986a, 136). A focus on familial practices from a children's standpoint, i.e. from the point of view of how they not only affect children (as in the study just discussed) but are in fact actively constructed and maintained by them, would be as feasible. Not only would it generate further evidence on the "new forms of familial socialization" which Buisson and Mermet (1986a) attempted to explore in

their analysis; beginning from a notion of socialization as construction and an agentic view of children themselves, the concepts of sociological family research could be specified so as to represent more adequately the modern families and familialities of contemporary children.¹⁷

4. Development of childhood: towards a genealogy of childhood concepts

Critique and deconstruction of sociology's conceptual knowledge not only bring disorder into that knowledge but also open it up for reconceptualization. Such conclusions as above, regarding the concepts of 'family' and 'socialization', can be systematized by arranging them into a historical line of development that also points to a possible next stage of conceptualizing the social phenomenon of childhood.

The method of genealogical deconstruction is predicated on the historical and social locatedness of any discursive construction (see pp. 43-48): there is then a 'reality' which becomes discursively represented in concepts.¹⁸ Concepts are not mere fictions; they do not originate in "the heaven of ideas" and descend from there (Ostner 1989, 60). And exactly because concepts are anchored in the earthly reality (in ways that deconstruction seeks to specify) they are able to reveal, at least some aspects and senses, of that social reality.

In the case of 'childhood', this implies that the social and historical development of the childhood phenomenon is, in one form or another, contained in the development of its concepts. Therefore the (scientific) constructions of childhood that presently exist provide a key to both past and present forms of childhood. Also, the most recent moves to be seen in childhood research, such as shifts in its focus and

¹⁷ An exploratory study that attempts to move in this direction is presented in Part VI.

¹⁸ This need not imply any form of essentialism.

emerging paradigms (Prout & James 1990), can be taken to be symptomatic of changes that have taken or are taking place in childhood as a lived reality.

This suggests a method for arriving at better, more adequate concepts for knowing the contemporary reality of childhood. It is, however, complicated by the reality-constructing nature of social (including scientific) activity. Through exploration and conceptualization of the social reality, scientists also participate in the construction of what is known and therefore counts as "real". Moreover, the knowledge that is generated within the institution of science has (in modern society) specific authority. In the case of childhood, since the latter half of the nineteenth century, scientifically generated knowledge of childhood has served as the basis for arguing for, implementing and legitimizing social arrangements that have become the institutionalized practices of (social) childhood. Modern childhood (in the West) is in fact predicated on its perpetual construction by science - by providing data on the state and development of its inhabitants - children - as well as crystallizing the discovered "truths" about children into concepts and theories (see e.g. Cooter 1992). And because science is deeply involved in the practical construction of childhood, the concepts with which the social sciences have represented childhood do not only have presented ('reflected') historical childhood; they have participated actively in constituting them.

We see, then, two intertwined processes through which childhood has been constructed - the process of its conceptual formation (in scientific knowledge) on the one hand and the process of its practical formation (in social reality) on the other - processes which are separable from each other only in thought.

Such reasoning fits in the story of the beginning of (social) childhood as Ariès (1962) has sketched it: childhood could be thought of and made into a concept first when it had emerged as a "real" abstraction from the rest of social reality.¹⁹ Since then

¹⁹ Richter (1987, 25) argues in a similar way that thinking about childhood required that a social distance, or break - and not closeness - prevailed between adults and children. - The concept of real abstraction derives from Marx's sociology of knowledge as he developed it in his analysis of capitalism. The real abstractions in that theory concern the process of exchange. See Himmelweit (1984), who elaborates the

the concept has changed and multiplied as social childhood has taken new shapes (while contributing itself to this). The implication is that for any concept of childhood to be a historically valid abstraction (of thought), it has to be shown to emerge from real processes - past and ongoing - in the society of which childhood is a part. Therefore, by placing concepts of childhood in the historical process in which childhood has emerged and developed, a more valid conceptualization of childhood can be approached.

Such a genealogy of childhood (concept) can be fully constructed only on the basis of historians' work on childhood - work that is emerging within Childhood Studies but remains at present very insufficient. Any genealogy of childhood concepts can therefore only be very tentative.

The first, clearly identifiable concept of childhood was **developmental**. It is based on observing the behaviour of the individual child. Such observations on a large scale were first made possible by the emergence of special habitats, or environments, for children to occupy. As the histories of childhood are beginning to reveal, the intimate family as well as the school were the first (and even today dominant) "childish" environments that were separated (abstracted) from general social life and subsequently institutionalized for more or less all social classes and populations groups (e.g. Ariès 1962; Donzelot 1980). This was the distance to children that first allowed childhood to become an object for (adult) reflection (Richter 1987).

The discursive formation that resulted from these processes of familialization and scholarization was 'the child' - now the object of special mentalities, care, rearing and pedagogical discourses. A range or repertoires of behaviour (*habitus*) also emerged that were identified as specific to this historical 'child'. The lengthy habitation of these settings by children contributed to the accumulation of knowledge about children's growth and development, their various needs and **as different** from those of adults, and the unfolding of the individual towards maturity and adulthood.

The construction of the developing child with particular needs is an explicitly psychological concept. Its employment in sociology has taken place through hiding it behind notions of the habitats deemed to be appropriate for that child, notably the family and school.

The second, **contextual** (or ecological) concept of childhood soon followed, constructed out of the fact that childhood had been institutionalized for at least a sizable proportion of the nation's children. Institutionalization became normal, prescriptive and controlled with the emergence of regulated practices and professional expertise. "Roles" were now recognized to exist even for children, linked to the positions that were granted to them within their institutions, and norms of behaviour corresponding to those positions were instituted (see Lüscher 1975, Bronfenbrenner 1978). Cultural accounts and ideologies emerged to legitimate the arrangements of the multiplying childhood settings and to make them function according to plans. Childhood now appeared in the form of 'socialization' - a process of transformation in individual children and taking place in the special and separate worlds of childhood.

The third concept of childhood, now barely emerging, is **categorical**. It is a presentation not of the universal, developing child nor the child in her (natural) context, but of 'children' as a social group, class or category.²⁰ Such an abstraction is predicated on a child population that is recognized as sharing a number of common features as a collectivity, in distinction to other collectivities (such as adults). This precondition can be traced (in the First World) to the completion of children's institutionalization by the state institutions of the family, school, health and welfare. Within such institutions, children received their own place; they had a social location planned and implemented for them (if necessary, with some social control) in the social structure (both national and global). "Children of the Nation" and, later, 'Children of the World' became comprehensible denotations in public debate and

²⁰ On categorical concepts in gender theory, see Connell (1987, 54-61).

policies could be planned and implemented to consciously influence their living conditions (Lüscher 1979, 1992), children's rights could be discussed and advocated (but the obligations of childhood that went with the positioning have been less frequently recognized and discussed; see Boulding 1979).

The normative institutionalization of children also implemented the normalization of modern childhood (Sgritta 1987) in terms of children's activities and everyday experience as well as life course (Büchner 1990); it implied a constraint towards uniformity and coherence among the child population even across otherwise differentiating structural factors such as class, region and gender (Hendricks 1990). The segregation of children into such homogenizing habitats created in turn the possibility of children's own (subversive) cultures (Silvers 1975; Østberg 1979; Daun 1982; Strandell 1988; Berentzen 1989).

In social science, the categorical construct of childhood directs attention to children as an independent unit of observation by focussing on their collective (generational) attributes as well as distinctions and divisions between the child generation and other social categories (particularly adults). Childhood appears as a generational experience that is now taken for granted. Therefore the focus of argument is not primarily on the processes by which the childhood category is constituted, or on its elements or constituents, but on generational relations. The social order is depicted as one dominated by concerns of other social categories, and thus the relationship between the categories of children and adults may now come to be considered in terms of conflicting interests, inequalities and power. This is the specific meaning of childhood that the International Childhood Project (Qvortrup 1990a) has aimed to develop. Its paradigm defines children, or the national child population (and not the child) as its unit of data and analysis; European childhood is described by way of distinguishing children's living conditions, rights and activities against those of other national populations (mostly, adults), and the level on which such a notion of childhood is written about is the social (sociological) level (Alanen & Bardy 1990, 12).

The logical successor of the categorical construct of childhood would be one that looks beyond the structured location of children as a socially constituted collectivity (with its social consequences) and focuses on the processes in which the social categories (children vs. adults) and their relationship is constituted. It has therefore to reflect on children's collective **agency**; the issue of choices and strategies, confrontations and contradictions are now added to the category notion. This generates a fourth, more political and **agentic** concept of childhood.

To be a valid abstraction for research the agentic concept must see that children are not ignored as a social class that participates in and contributes to even the very construction of childhood, i.e. in the practical politics, confrontations and struggles of everyday social life. This means, by way of parallelling it with the development from a class *an sich* to a class *für sich*, children become participants and contributors by developing a shared consciousness of their autonomous interests, by articulating them and mobilizing for their implementation.

At present there are obvious difficulties for children to succeed in doing this openly, deriving from their positioning in the institutionalized forms of modern social life. However, traces of such can at least be seen by looking into the cultures that children develop within their institutional environments, whereas explicit political presence of children, recognized (negatively) by adult society too, has rarely succeeded and then only sporadically and in limited contexts (e.g. within struggles for democracy in schools and pupil rights). Adult society expresses both legitimate reasons and a multitude of good arguments for making children's politics nonexistent or at least invisible. Nevertheless, when and where it arises, it is mostly ridiculed or marginalized by other means. This seems often to be the case even when children's interests are taken to the public arena by adult advocates of their cause, e.g. in the context of discussions around children's rights (see Franklin 1986).

However, it may be that children act 'politically' far more frequently and in more numerous arenas than the adult society is willing to see - in which case children's

reality has not yet been caught adequately by those concepts of childhood that dominate public debates.

Within Childhood Studies, it seems that researchers are accepting the children's agency first in its individual form, but not yet at a collective, social level.²¹ Before researchers have seen its emergence, it seems that it has been notified both earlier and more sensitively in literature and its analysis (see e.g. Kuhn (1982) on the literary constructs of "the dangerous child" and "children in power", and Lurie (1990) on children's subversive use of "children's fiction").

It might be argued, on the basis of the above tentative genealogy of childhood concepts, that some of the childhood concepts are more in place as sociology's working tools than others. It might seem particularly pertinent to exclude the developmental construct from the tools of sociological analysis because of its focus on the individual child. Sociology's commitment to work on the social phenomenon of childhood would suggest as appropriate such approaches that contain more categorical and agentic notions.

The answer, however, may not be as simple as this. The study of childhood did begin and frameworks and theories were first developed within the disciplines of psychology and pedagogy. Predominantly physiological and psychological notions such as sequential growth and maturation, stages of development and developmental tasks have been continuously refined in this tradition. But because these understandings of childhood were contained in the social practices that shaped and solidified childhood as a social - contextual, categorical and finally agentic - phenomenon they have, so to say, survived in historically later constructions. While doing this, and in interaction with more recent constructions, these originally physiological and psychological notions have gained a social quality as well. Empirical

²¹ Evidence of children's agency at the interindividual, interactional level is to a great extent the contribution of phenomenological and ethnographic analyses of children's everyday lives. See e.g. Prout & James (1990) and Solberg (1990).

children are thus not only individual cases of childhood, with unique identities and personalities which are researchable within frameworks of psychology. Individually they also display a social habitus of the child (cf. the first, developmental notion), they live in and make their own specific social environments (the second, contextual notion), they act as members of socially constituted categories (the categorical notion) as well as they are, or are becoming, social agents (the agentic notion).

Thus in reality the psychological and sociological 'levels' interact and penetrate each other. Accordingly, this should also be the case for the most valid construction of contemporary childhood. Divisions between disciplines cannot remain neat and approaches within disciplines obviously need to converge; the interdisciplinary Childhood Studies seem also to testify to such development. Sociology's research traditions and conceptual frameworks tend to address themselves differentially, and mostly exclusively, to the various "levels" of childhood. Socialization research for example, perhaps the strongest tradition in sociological childhood research (see e.g. Thorne 1987; Alanen 1988), hardly extends beyond the limits of thinking set by the contextual concept of childhood, whichever the particular school.²²

Cultural analyses of childhood might be able to take the next conceptual step, e.g. by accepting that children develop their own subcultures that, moreover, confront one or more hegemonic (adult) cultures.²³ Descriptive studies of children's cultural worlds and their differences from that of adults develop some category concepts of childhood and may even include notions of power, domination or social control in explaining (and not only describing) children's cultures. However, when emphasis moves to children's cultures as their (partly) autonomous creations, the analysis is moving towards employing a more agentic concepts.

This denies the validity of an outsider position and takes the 'child question' in sociology into the critical discussion of **standpoint**. As was presented as the fourth

²² But see here e.g. Adler & Adler (1986, 3-5) and Waksler (1991, 3-11).

²³ For such assumptions, see e.g. Østberg (1979) and Daun (1982).

lesson of academic feminism, this is the question of knowledge. What do children know? Can we accept, as the agentic concept would require, that children know their world in a way that we (i.e. adults, researchers) cannot know, because only they see the world from a location that is theirs? Should we take their consciousness of the world as serious knowledge, in the sense that feminist have discussed women's knowledge? Is there, in analogy to feminist theory, a possibility of 'childist' knowledge?²⁴

²⁴ The term 'childist' is from Hunt (1984a, 1984b).

V. CHILDHOOD AND STANDPOINT

The issue of what qualifies as knowledge pertains not only to strategies of empirical research and questions such as the status to be given to children as knowers. The 'science question in feminism' is, as mentioned earlier, really about the standpoints from which the world can be "known". Feminist scholars have argued, as well as demonstrated, that established sociology "knows" society from a masculine standpoint. This knowledge has been written into the sociological texts by which any sociologist comes to look at, interpret, explain and research the social. There is, moreover, no "innocent" knowledge located outside particular standpoints, no "bird's eye view" from a position that is no one's in particular. Thus the project of writing a feminist sociology has to start from the locations where women actually are, where they participate in the social relations that organize their "everyday/everynight" world, their experiences as well as their knowledge. This is sociology from a women's standpoint (Smith 1988; 1989).

Extending this logic from women to children, once again, is to ask similar questions in the case of children: What do children know? Is there a children's standpoint for sociology to adopt? Would such a standpoint be essential for a sociology of childhood?

If the central concept used to structure the inquiry into childhood is the first, developmental one, the question of standpoint hardly even rises. The way childhood is known through the developmental concept rules out children as knowers of their own (social) condition. What they might say of their families, schools, or their social environment in general when asked, is already, beforehand, set into relation to what

we might expect children of this or that chronological age or developmental stage to know (and to know how to articulate it). Because they are children, they cannot know what they will know when they have grown up.

But what children know as they now are is not therefore irrelevant knowledge. On the contrary, the fact that children live in a fast changing society requires that any knowledge of children's social, emotional and intellectual development is constantly monitored and updated and the contents of such processes perfected as children confront new items in their everyday social worlds. The standpoint from which such knowledge is generated would, however, be his/her who is in charge of, responsible for, or interested in promoting the child's good, or optimal, development towards adulthood.

The standpoint inherent in the second concept of childhood that focuses on children's interaction within and in relation to their social environments has been presented above as that of the 'agents' of influence. Agency resides elsewhere. Moreover, the agents who are in the position to influence, socialize, teach, instruct etc. children would think as relevant knowledge such as not only concerns their own, but also other agents' relative influence. This depicts the standpoint of such knowledge as potentially contradictory, perhaps even conflictual; for children, however, its knowers remain firmly their significant and more powerful others and children are - perhaps for their own good - objectified also in the knowledge process.

When children are seen to form a social category of their own, the idea of a distinct children's perspective also becomes interesting in its own right. This would be, as Marianne Gullestad (1991, 63-65) writes, something that an adult researcher would deliberately strive to catch; it is more than a just his/her perspective on children; it gives above all the children's perspective on society and culture in a new and critical light; it is a qualitatively different view of the social world (see also Mandell 1988). With such an approach, children are the necessary and fundamental resource for the desired knowledge; sensitive and friendly observation as well as discussions provide

the methods for obtaining such knowledge (Fine & Sandstrom 1988; Mandell 1988).

To adopt the child perspective in this sense implies, for the process of knowing childhood, that it does not aim at a better control of children (Telhaug 1991,71), however beneficial and in the child's best interests such control is intended to be; it means rather to diminish the power differential between children and other social groups and to make them into fuller members of society (ibid, 72) - an equality project.

What could be said of the standpoint in the last, most recent and barely recognizable agentic concept of childhood? It assumes that the institutionalized practices of childhood organize for the category of children, particular locations from which they are compelled to participate in social life: agency cannot be circumvented. Therefore, through their everyday participation, children (as any members) gain a particular range of experiences which contains knowledge about the social relations within which they daily live. This knowledge is normally not articulated and therefore remains hidden, implicit and unconceived. Why? The first candidate for an explanation repeats the adult ideological standpoint of benevolence that considers childhood a time of not having to know, and concluding that therefore children also do not know. (A less benevolent attitude states simply that "they are only children, what can they know?" - see Blitzer 1991). Another suggestion for the inconceivability of the statement that children have 'serious' knowledge of their society, that is not accessible for adults, might begin from the fact that the experience of relatedness to the world is, after all, gained individually and that an experiencing individual is his/herself constantly changing physically and psychologically. Perhaps our everyday language - and even more the language of science - is not suited for articulating such an experience?

Notwithstanding such speculations, it can be argued that, socio-logically, an account of society **from the point where children stand** - that is, from a children's standpoint - is in principle just as conceivable as any of the theoretical accounts of more conventional 'adult sociologies'. Moreover, such an account cannot be less factual.

This final conclusion presently stands in a stark contrast to the more common adultist standpoint of standard sociology and takes further the liberal, or democratic, attitude of the child perspective. It is at present far from clear how feasible the idea of writing a sociology from a children's standpoint is and whether society can, in principle, be known from the point where children stand. However, the perspective is extremely challenging.

VI. CHILDHOOD IN SOCIAL CHANGE: AN EMPIRICAL EXPLORATION

1. The one-parent family discourse and the alternative approach

Judging from the range of themes and topics evident in research on one-parent families, the main reason for interest in such information is the concern felt about children growing up in such environments. Reviews of one-parent family research clearly indicate that at issue are mainly the effects of parents' divorce on children's development and functioning (Levitin 1979; Napp-Peters 1985; Clason 1989; Deven 1986; Furstenberg 1990). Levitin (1979, 1-2) writes that the earliest studies in this 'children of divorce' tradition took the one-parent family as a deviant and disadvantageous form of what was imagined to be the normal family and focused then on detecting dysfunctions, maladjustments and pathologies in children's behaviour and development that would result from living in such environments. In the same tradition, a shift has more recently taken place towards viewing the one-parent family as a transitional form between the events of divorce and remarriage. The message, however, continues to be much the same, i.e. that a child's place is in "the family". - The frame of thinking about childhood derives from the conventional story of the family and familial socialization; conceptually this operates on the developmental and contextual levels; children are victims rather than subjects; agency is transferred to facets of society ("socializing agents") and childhood appears as a mere site of the interaction of social variables (see e.g. Guidubaldi & Perry & Nastasi 1987).

From such a standpoint, children do not come into view as active human beings. However, in studies with clinical or therapeutical focus, more than just the problems and difficulties are essential facets of daily life in one-parent families. Consequently, more attention is given to the strengths of such families as well as to the experiences and feelings of children themselves (Levitin 1979, 2-3; Nelson 1985, 119-132); more likely children have to be treated as central informants (Hetherington 1979; Wallerstein & Kelly 1980; Hingst 1981; Schlesinger 1982; Wallerstein & Blakeslee 1989). However, the psychological frame of such scholarship prevents us from going beyond this and including children also as social actors who are themselves actively involved in constructing their own everyday life.

For many women and their children, the one-parent family is presently not at all a transitional form of living. Divorced women do not any more remarry as frequently as they did earlier, and in any case they do so considerably less than divorced men. Statistically, the mother-child family is becoming a normal case in Western industrialized countries (Chester 1977; Deven & Cliquet 1986, 125-236). This also contributes to its **cultural normalization** as an alternative way of living (Thompson & Gongla 1983). The change is already indicated in the terminology: in the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s the customary way of speech was in the (moralizing) terms of "broken" or "incomplete" families (Deven 1986, 16-17); the less value-loaden "one-parent family" is a recent invention.

The social implications of this are even greater, and only beginning to be seen - and wait to be studied. Based on studies on women, some scholars have suggested that the 'microchanges' that women make concerning their forms of living, friendships and personal lives, in fact imply redefinitions of the boundaries of the private and the public and thus break the logic of the modern separation of the two 'spheres'. Such changes, moreover, silently and undramatically generate pressures towards real institutional changes, as for instance in the arrangements of working life and in the institutionalized patterns of men's behaviour (Martiny 1989; Chandler 1991). Similarly,

Monique Buisson and Jean-Claude Mermet (1986), in their study of the various familialities that are constructed in the post-divorce situation, illustrate the social impact that 'marginal' forms of living are beginning to have (see pp. 96-97 above).

Such agency is easier to detect when the position is one of freely and consciously choosing to change existing forms of living and to reconstruct personal relationships. In contrast, it is not nearly as easy to see anyone's agency at work when choices and decisions are made in situations which are not freely and willingly intended, as divorce typically would be. Moreover, because women in such situations do not typically command rich material resources, the changes in their everyday lives become interpreted (within the deficiency frame) as a reaction to or a constrained outcome of forced circumstances, rather than as a generator of social change (as the the agency frame might suggest). This is why, Martiny (1989) argues, the richness in the forms of women's everyday life and the (macro)social relevance of their personal relationship have been systematically understudied. The preassumption has, moreover, been that social change starts from the public, and not from the private sphere. Women, however, do not have the same access to the public arenas as do men, and therefore women's agency is in action and changes induced by women are typically in the private sphere.

If the 'new families' (Dornbusch & Strober 1988) are such a prominent arena of (women-induced) 'macro-changes', and they often include children, the question is what is the children's place in such changes? Are they only involved in them along with their mothers or do they themselves contribute to such changes? By shifting the focus from women to children as social actors the question may be explored.

How is, for instance, the spectrum of children's experience and their everyday activities affected by the fact that they live in a one-adult household? How are the relationships between generations organized in such households and what difference do they make for children? Robert Weiss (1979) writes, on the basis of his study, that children in single-parent households often have no other option than to participate in

their households as full members. This means that their rights and responsibilities are larger than for many children living in conventional two-adult families. It also means that the power structure between the generations is changed. This Weiss sees as leading to the growth of self-esteem, independence and a sense of competence in these children. It makes sense then to ask further how opportunities and resources are distributed to children in such family arrangements and which possibilities are particularly opened for them. How do children use them? Are some opportunities closed? How far are children constrained by other people and how far by the material and social circumstances in which one-parent families live? Parents certainly are 'givens' for children: they cannot be chosen and dependency on them is still very much a fact of modern childhood. But children may also "use" their parents as resources, and they can be seen to use them differently.

2. After the family: The Nordic study

The psychologically and pedagogically argued mainstream discourse of childhood assumes that for their own best (i.e. development) children need to be left within the particular child-size "micro-worlds" that expressly prevent them from agency in the larger, "macro-world" until they are adequately socialized for entering it. The alternative of a children's standpoint, which has been elaborated earlier on the conceptual level, is to start empirical inquiry from children's participation and co-partnership in social life, i.e. in the construction and sustaining of the material, social and cultural relationships that make the frame of their (and our) everyday lives and out of which the complexities of society emerge. Such an *agentic* approach is also needed for bringing children out of "the family" in which mainstream sociology has placed, and left, them. Family would not be taken for granted; it would rather be explored as to its place and meaning in children's everyday lives. Family (or

familiarity) would, moreover, not be considered a stable and constraining fact in children's lives but their work, or construction, as well (see pp. 96-97).

The following study attempts such an exploration into the everyday lives of children living in one-parent households. It is based on the data collected within a cooperative Nordic project in which altogether 100 children and their mothers from four Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden) were interviewed.¹ The children's age range was from nine to thirteen years. At the time of interviewing they were living in 'well established' one-parent households in the sense that at least two years, in many cases considerably longer, had passed since parental divorce. The organization of everyday life in these households was premised on there being one adult (in this case, mother) in the household.

The interpretation of results below is based on working on the total sample of one hundred children and mothers, although the data presented here are only on the Finnish national sample.² The analysis is meant as a methodological exercise in a children's standpoint, as developed above. What follows, then, is not a report on the Nordic study as a whole or any part of it.³

¹ The Nordic study was motivated by dissatisfaction with the state of knowledge concerning the one-parent family as an environment for children to grow up in. Rethinking was in place because this 'family form' is increasingly becoming statistically and culturally normalized, particularly in the Nordic countries. Its representation as a deviant, deficient or transitory household type, and, moreover, as a risky socialization setting for children, is increasingly contrary to this trend. (A review of Nordic research of one-parent families was compiled as the first stage of the project; for the result, see Lassbo et al. 1991). The empirical study was, therefore, constructed to provide a qualitative analysis of the organization of everyday life in families of divorced women and their children, and to contribute to a critical reflection of sociological analyses of the family phenomenon and of socialization theory.

² The main reason for this is the agreement between the co-researchers that Nordic results should be published in the joint report before individual researchers present them. A second reason is the 'qualitative' mode in which the interview data (particularly concerning the children) were organized by the individual researchers. Identical procedures were not followed in this and, therefore, the child data concerning the three other countries were not equally useful for the present analysis.

³ Such a report is forthcoming (Alanen & Bak & Lassbo & Moxnes 1992). For earlier reports on aspects of the study, see the articles by the research team (Alanen, Bak, Lassbo, Moxnes) in Björnberg (1992).

3. The organization of data

There is no reason to doubt that the mothers of the one-parent families studied are the best-informed adults in matters pertaining to their children's past and present lives. They are, however, differently positioned in social life - either as 'adults' or as 'children' - and this also applies to everyday life within their own households. Therefore, care was taken in the interviews to regard the children themselves as the significant informants on their own particular experience and on knowing what it is to be positioned as a child. They were asked to give information on their daily activities and family relationships, how they relate to other people and to the adult world in general, as well as on the material and social conditions of their daily life. Similar topics on children's lives were also taken up by interviewing the mothers in order to have a view on them from two different standpoints.

As a first step the interview data were organized by writing accounts of the children's everyday life on the basis of individual interviews. Each account included the following information.

1. Personal history
2. Everyday life: activities during weekdays, weekends, vacations
3. Economy, property and access to other material resources
4. Relations to school and generally to the world of adults
5. Use of space: inside - outside
6. Personal relationships: relatives, friends, father

Similarly structured accounts were also written for the mothers including an additional seventh point that concerned their experiences and problems of being a single parent as well as a comparison of contemporary childhood with their own childhood.

In writing the children's accounts, special care was taken to write them in ways that preserved the children's agency, which was also done when data from the

mothers' interviews were added into them. The children, for this end, had to remain the units, or subjects, on which the data informed. - To give an example, here is the account (very much shortened) that was written on Joni, a boy of 11 years.⁴

Joni lives with his mother in a large house in the centre of town. His father lives with his new partner in a suburb. His older sister is married, has two children and lives on the same town.

When Joni was born his family lived in a one-family house in the outskirts of the town. Later they moved into the apartment where Joni now lives. His sister married and moved away five years ago. Joni went to a day-care centre until he started school. In that same year his father moved away from their home to live with another woman. His mother then divorced him and since then Joni has been meeting his father regularly two weekends each month and two weeks in the summer.

Joni wakes up around 7 am, gets up and makes his bed, eats his breakfast, checks that all school books are with him and leaves for school. There he enjoys most of all sports and technical work - "most other subjects are boring". No trouble, however, with teachers.

After school he comes home, often with a friend, then goes out to play and stays there until 7 pm. After supper, he does his homework, watches TV, reads or plays at his PC, sometimes with friends. Once or twice a week he goes out for hobbies like badminton or miniature air planes.

He sees his sister and her family a couple of times a week and sometimes helps his mother to babysit the children. And every second weekend he leaves on Friday evening, until Sunday evening, to spend the weekend with his father and his new partner.

In the summer vacation Joni visits friends and relatives, goes on camp, travels with his mother and spends some time at a summer cottage with his father.

At home Joni is to keep his own room tidy. Sometimes he washes the dishes, does the shopping and helps in shovelling the snow or cooking. At his father's home he helps with the cleaning and sometimes with the cooking. At the summer cottage there is all kind of work that he shares with others.

Joni gets a monthly allowance of 100 FIM; no extra is paid for domestic work. He has an account of his own, and all his bigger expenses are paid from this account. He may himself draw money from this account, but then he also has to pay it back. Extra money may come from grandparents. To make more money to buy things, Joni sometimes distributes advertisements for a shopkeeper. Mother normally buys him the things he

⁴ All the names appearing here are fictional and the original accounts written out of the primary data are reproduced here in a slightly changed form in order to make the identification of the interviewed children (and mothers) impossible.

requires. Together they are presently saving for a new pair of skis. The small TV that he has in this room is from his father. Father also pays for the trips they make together during vacations.

The adults that Joni meets and does things with are all his relatives: his parents (and father's partner), sister's family, grandparents and an uncle.

Joni has a room of his own. As he lives in the centre of town everything - school, shops, friends etc. - are already near. At his father's home, Joni has a room of his own where he can keep many of his own things, not needing to carry everything with him when goes there for week-ends.

Joni is very much out-of-doors with his friends: he has a large circle of friends, all of them boys from the neighbourhood whom he sees each day (except when he is seeing his father). They ride with their bikes, go to the swimming hall, play badminton, or go skiing. He also spends time with his mother watching TV and helping with kitchen work, or going for a walk, and visiting friends or relatives. They also make vacation trips together. When staying with his father "we just do things together at home or go for a ride with the car. I really don't need any friends over there. "We just jump into the car and start driving, and if we find something exciting for us to see we just drive there." Father's partner is OK; Joni sometimes cooks or just talks with her and they also go for walks together.

Joni's favourite visiting places are his father's and his sister's families, also his grandparents. It is with his mother, first and foremost, with whom he shares his sorrows and problems.

4. Social dimensions of child life

The significance of this mode of organizing the interview data is that it allows us to see children's life apart from (in this case) their mothers' everyday life and, consequently, to identify the extent to which the two are in fact integrated. **Integration** and **autonomy** of child life in relation to mother's life were defined in this study by the degree to which mothers and children share (1) their free-time and (2) their friends and acquaintances (including kin), (3) with whom the child prefers to discuss and share his/her personal matters like problems and sorrows and (4) the extent to which the mother is informed about events, people and things, in the general flow of the

child's daily activities. On this information two "types" were identified: integrated child life and autonomous child life.

Out of twenty-five children, it appeared that sixteen led a daily life that is closely related to that of their mothers, while nine seemed to be more autonomous in the running of their daily life. There is no clear difference between "integrated" and "autonomous" children in their average age and, therefore, it cannot be concluded that autonomy would follow from increasing 'maturity'. Thus a life that is integrated with the mother is not necessarily "childish", and autonomy at a young age need not make children into (premature) adults. There is, however, a slight gender difference as the "autonomous" children turned out more often to be boys than girls. But this again does not mean that an integrated life is a girl-life: half of all the children whose everyday life is integrated with that of their mothers' are in fact boys.

A second dimension that differentiates between the children in the Nordic sample concerns the **organization**, or the agentic management of the children's daily life outside formally organized school life. The significance of this dimension follows from acknowledging the potentiality of children as social agents. This includes the possibility of children largely managing their own affairs on their own. Modern childhood tends to be - or at least is thought to be - familialized in the sense that children are generally regarded as dependent on their parents. These are normally in command of more material, social and other resources than children and thus in a stronger position to shape the everyday conditions of child-life. Therefore the expectation is that parents are the main organizers of children's everyday lives. Also the prevalent ideological normalization of a familial childhood and its parental counterpart - a (normative) model of motherhood - includes the expectation that mothers are to be responsible for the general management of their children's life outside school.

But how is it in fact? It has been argued that the social status of 'being a child' has radically changed and that the practices of modern childhood have repositioned

children apart from their families - childhood has been 'individualized' (Honig 1988; Büchner 1990). This means, for children, increased opportunities but also constraints to move on many arenas and between them, and to manage their demands individually. The one-parent family, moreover, may well add to this general individualization of children's life. The decomposition of families, in divorce or separation, may in fact leave children with more resources as well as opportunities to pursue activities and build up social relations more autonomously than is the case with children in two-parent households. The study of Weiss (1979) revealed such an instance of dissolving the generational superordinate-subordinate structure when there is only one parent left in the household. In the new situation, novel intergenerational partnerships may emerge and even assert themselves, between parents and children. Weiss describes particularly the redistribution of rights and responsibilities in one-parent households, and shows that this can provide children with the useful and appreciated experience of "growing up a little faster" in such families, whereas it may be that a two-parent household prevents children from having the same experience (ibid).

The recent discussion on children's rights and increased arguments for a greater respect for children in matters directly concerning them (e.g. custody) may here provide mothers with the necessary justification for adopting this kind of family reorganization, whether it takes place by force of circumstances or out of mothers' conscious wish to provide their children with more influence in their (shared) daily life.

In order to differentiate between the children, the availability and management of various familial and nonfamilial resources like (1) time, (2) space, (3) money, (4) people (parents, neighbours, relatives, school teachers, other adults, peers) and (5) social and commercial services were examined in each case. The two candidates for organizers of children's free time, money use, contacts with other people etc. were, of course, the mother and the child. It appeared that the mother carries the "burden" of

managing these things for the child in 40 % of the twenty-five mother-child households (10), while the child is the main organizer in 20 % of the cases (5). This leaves 10 households (or 40 %) in which the mother and the child act as co-organizers.

Age appears weakly related to this fact of children's lives: children's daily lives are somewhat more often organized by the mothers when they are younger and children themselves are more active with the management of their daily course of activities and social contacts when they are older. A gender difference is more clearly to be seen: there are more boys than girls among both the co-organized and self-organized children than among the mother-organized. (The difference is not equally pronounced in the over-all Nordic sample.)

These two dimensions - **autonomy vs. integration** and **mother- vs. self-organization** - vary independently of each other. Mothers may actively organize both integrated and autonomous everyday life for their children, and children themselves may in turn pursue autonomy in their daily activities but may also choose to stay closely involved in their mothers' everyday life. By "cross-tabulating" these two dimensions six categories of possible life patterns of children's daily life are created and can be used to account for the diversity of child life in one-parent families.

The placing of children into the six categories shows that such patterns exist: cases were found in each of the six "boxes" (see the scheme on the next page).

The most frequent combination is the mother-organized child life which is integrated to that of the mother. Out of the twenty-five children, one third (or eight cases out of twenty-five) display this pattern. The autonomous lifestyle that is organized mainly by the child him/herself proves to be the least frequent pattern, but it is nevertheless present in nine cases. In the following scheme the distribution of life patterns on the two dimensions are also shown.

Child's everyday life in relation to mother's

*Autonomous**Integrated*

The main organizer of child's everyday life	<i>Mother</i>	2	8
	<i>Shared</i>	4	6
	<i>Child</i>	3	2

In order to advance from this rather static description of the variety of children's everyday lives towards a more dynamic analysis, three accounts of children's everyday lives are first presented. Two of the children are girls whose everyday life is (or has been) organized by their mother and well integrated into her own life. There are, however, clear differences between their contemporary daily lives. The third case is of a boy that displays a clear pattern of self-organized and (relatively) autonomously maintained childhood. All three cases make clear that children themselves can be and are in fact active in using the various resources of their everyday environment to construct their everyday life. As their resources differ, and as their mothers have in different ways allowed access to a range of resources, the result of children's construction work is also different in the three cases.

5. Patterns of everyday life: Suvi, Sanna and Pete

Suvi (9 years) is one of the children belonging to the largest group whose everyday life is both closely integrated with that of her mother's, and mother-organized.

When Suvi's parents separated several years ago she and her mother moved to their present home town. Her father wanted to live near her, so he, too, found a new job for himself in the same town and moved there. Suvi now lives with her mother in a suburb, and her father in an apartment in another suburb of the town. Since last year her father has a new partner living with him.

Suvi goes to a school which is quite far from home. She needs to be taken there in the mornings and fetched from there in the afternoon by her mother or some other child's parent. She does not particularly like school, but it is, of course, there. All her friends are from school, and friends make school OK. As her friends live around the town, she doesn't see them outside school unless special arrangements are made and someone takes the children to see each other. This may happen once a week. Sometimes when mother goes off for the weekend, Suvi stays with a school friend's family or her father. So far mother has never left Suvi alone in the house.

Mother and Suvi spend a lot of their free-time together, either at home or visiting families that her mother has known for years. Once a week she is taken by her mother to a music lesson and every second week to a riding lesson. They may also go to visit the city library, or just stroll downtown for some shopping. "Suvi has no need for her own money", her mother says. (She usually gets one mark per week.) They try to be back home by 8 o'clock so as to have Suvi in bed early. Once a week they have an evening together at home, taking first a sauna and then eating and chatting.

There are not many things for Suvi to do at home: her mother looks after their tiny household. Sometimes Suvi helps an old lady next door with her shopping or baby-sits for a family that lives in the next house. There are no children living near them with whom Suvi could play. Summers are spent visiting Suvi's aunt and her family in the country. Suvi and her mother might also make short visits to friends elsewhere. They rarely travel abroad.

Suvi now sees her father once a week. Earlier, when her father did not live with his new partner, she spent more time with him. Parents call each other weekly and agree on Suvi's visiting days. Either her mother takes her there or her father comes to fetch her. Usually she stays there overnight, and if it is a weekday, goes straight from there to school. Suvi has seen the children that live in the same house, but she rarely plays with them. She prefers to stay inside, reading comic books, watching TV or playing games with father and his new partner. She keeps no things of her own at father's home and sleeps in the living room when staying overnight. It's quite OK to be there, she says.

Mother always knows where Suvi is and what she is doing. Mother is the person with whom Suvi prefers to share her sorrows and troubles, but father, too, is a significant person to her.

The structure of daily activities of children found to belong to this group is determined essentially by school and by home: children's friends are mostly from

school and after-school life takes place at home and its surroundings. Relatives live mostly elsewhere, so face-to-face contacts are more seldom whereas there are weekly contacts by phone - thus moderate contacts are maintained. Instead, daily and fairly intense contacts are maintained with mother's friends who often live in the neighbourhood. Mothers' networks include mostly women, and there are also other single mothers among them.

Children and mothers in this group share friends and acquaintances. Children have learned to know the homes and families of their mothers' friends; mothers, too, know most of their children's friends from school and something about their families as well. Children's everyday life takes place in homes and familial settings.

Children, however, make differential use of the resources that are available to them in these settings. There are in this group also children whose everyday life pattern may have sometime earlier resembled the home-based, family-centred life of Suvi but has later been extended beyond its close familial boundaries.

Sanna is one of these children and presently about the same age as Suvi. Her daily life is also centrally organized around school and her home and she, too, belongs to the group of mother-organized and integrated children. There are, however, also some remarkable differences between her and Suvi.

Sanna (10 years) lives with her mother and older sister in a suburb with high blocks of apartments. Her parents divorced when she was four and moved to smaller apartments close to each other. Two years later Sanna's mother took a bank loan and bought an apartment for her and the two girls in another suburb. They have now lived there for five years. Since then Sanna's father moved to another town more than 300 km away.

When Sanna wakes up in the morning, her mother has already gone out with their two dogs. When mother comes back her friend Sonja often follows. Sonja lives nearby and shares the family's interest in animals. Together the women see that the girls get up, make a quick breakfast and have it together.

Sanna thinks school is OK, but nothing special - she has not much to say about it. After school she comes home and makes herself a snack and takes out the smaller dog - her sister takes out the bigger one. She may call her mother or go to do the shopping - there is always money left in a tin can at the kitchen table to buy necessities. She then usually

does her homework. Sometimes afternoons are boring, especially if her best friend (from school) is not there. Then she might call her mother several times.

Mother is back from work around five. She prepares an evening meal and they have it together. After this point both girls are to look after themselves, make an evening snack and go to bed at 10 o'clock at the latest. Her mother's own time starts now. She often stays at home, doing normal housework or reading. In any case she goes out with the dogs and knows that she will see people she knows there. Sonja is most probably there and afterwards they often go to her home to sit and chat, have something to eat and perhaps some wine. From Sonja's kitchen window she sees when Sanna's bedroom light goes off. Sanna also knows where to find her if she should have something special to tell her, but she also knows to respect her mother's own time.

On some evenings and especially during weekends mother's other friends may visit Sanna's home. Mother has a number of close friends, all from the time she has been a lone mother. Her friends are single or divorced women, or lone mothers like she. They all live in their own households and share many interests. Their homes and households mix easily with each other and services are often exchanged, e.g. Sanna and her sister might make a weekend trip with one of the women with her car, leaving their mother to have a child-free weekend. Sanna knows all of them well, does many things with them herself and likes particularly one of them who has become - as Sanna's mother says - a kind of surrogate mother, or a trusted adult friend for her. Another woman, also her mother's friend, who lives outside town but often comes to stay with them during weekend, functions as a part-time mother for Sanna. "If she says something, Sanna takes her words more seriously than from many other adults," her mother comments. Sanna may go to see these women or ring them also on her own, not needing her mother to mediate contacts.

For some years Sanna's father has lived in another town where his elderly mother also lives. As far as Sanna knows he lives there alone. She has not met her father in many years, and even then it was more by coincidence when she was visiting her grandmother together with her older sister. The girls are used to travelling. But father is not that significant for Sanna: "there is nothing to be expected from father", she says. Things are fine for her as they are. Sanna's mother, too, is very satisfied with the absence of her former husband - or any man, she adds - in their present life.

Sanna moves daily within social relations that go beyond the frame of a protected nuclear family childhood. Sanna's mother has made her own network of friends available to her daughter, by letting her get involved in the activities and interests of adults around her and leaving space for Sanna to use her own social resources. Suvi, in contrast, has lived all her life in a nuclear (and lately 'binuclear')

family, despite her parents' divorce and her everyday world is physically and socially more restricted than Sanna's: she is a family child. Sanna and some other children in the mother-organized and integrated group do not experience the boundaries of "the family" as clear and particularly as significant. Their familial relationships have been extended to people outside their minimal nucleus of mother and daughters (sisters). For Sanna's mother this is, in fact, a result of her forced poverty during the time she was a student and a mother of two young children. Now she says she has grown accustomed to her "lifestyle of poverty" and never thinks of settling down as "only a family" - she thinks of it as a cage which she now has escaped forever. She has, moreover, developed a feminist orientation that also supports her present way of life in a sort of extended family, or *familialité*.⁵ Both of her daughters have "used" her personal relationships also for constructing their own everyday world: they, too, share her newly created *familialité*.⁶

The organization of everyday life in terms of more extensive familial relationships is not, however, generated or supported by a feminist consciousness only. Jenni's mother, for instance, has an intensive and mobile personal network consisting of both her own siblings and their children (Jenni's cousins) and of her non-kin woman friends who live in the town and whom she sees a lot every week. They arrange to have sauna parties, prepare meals or to go out to eat together. As her friends also share her interests in music, art and travel they combine these by deciding to take the

⁵ '*Familialité*' (*familialité*), as introduced above (see pp. 96-97), refers to the social space that is created when the social relations originally at the margins of "the family" are redefined as familial. This may be carried out by explicitly articulating a new family space (like Sanna's mother did in their relations with her adult friends) or more practically by simply starting to employ those relations for familial functions. In both cases they become the 'axis' for organizing everyday life (or at least significant sections of it).

⁶ Recently the older daughter, aged 14, tried living outside home for a short period together with a school friend who lives nearby. She moved to a "mini-apartment" (with bath-room and a kitchen corner) that is separate from, but nevertheless connected to the dwelling of the friend's (two-parent) family. The two girls shared the apartment, taking care of school, homework and meals by themselves during that time.

car and go together to a concert or to the theatre in another town. Jenni has since babyhood been part of this mobile network of her mother's kin, colleagues and friends, and moves freely within it. Her mother presents their way of life as a result of her being rejected by married couples after her divorce and having to turn to her own (single) friends for enjoyment and support. She also remembers how in her childhood everyone in her family was obliged to entertain guests. She hated it, and now, in her own life, she never asks anyone to visit her unless there is mutual sympathy. Because she wanted her daughter to have a 'better' childhood than she herself had had, she early made a conscious effort to include Jenni in own everyday network of friends and make it her social home, too. This strategy has been successful: having lived within her mother's personal network all her life Jenni has learned to operate many of its material, social and cultural resources competently by herself.

Most of the children whose everyday life is mainly organized by their mother clearly display, however, the restricted and protected familialized childhood pattern that was Suvi's. Suvi lives it out within the "classical" setting of childhood - the two-parent heterosexual (bi)nuclear family - but this is far from being the common case for these children. Out of the ten children, whose mothers are the main organizers of their daily lives, six see their fathers frequently and regularly, mostly every second weekend as well as during vacations. The family arrangements for the rest of the children are distributed between all other alternatives: they see their father only on day visits or during infrequent and irregularly arranged weekends or (like Sanna) have no contacts at all with their father. The three autonomous and self-organized boys, however, are all outside the binuclear family arrangement.⁷

⁷ Children's contact patterns with their fathers were found to be the following:

- I. **Binuclear family system (BFS):** The child sees the father regularly, according to a "contract" known to both the parents and the child. The most common arrangement includes every second weekend and (at least) two weeks on summer vacation. - Nine out of the 25 children (36 %) live within a functioning BFS.
- II. **Overnight visiting:** contacts are less frequent and less regular than in the case of BFS; visits take place at weekends and occasionally on summer (or other) vacations. Fathers may live in the same town or as much as 400 km away. Four children display this pattern.
- III. **Day visiting:** contacts take place only in daytime. Fathers and children live in the same town and

The children's satisfaction with their own father relationship is not particularly dependent on their own visiting pattern. Most of the children are, according to their mothers' estimation, more or less satisfied with their present relationship to their father or it does not really matter to them that much. There is, in fact, more dissatisfaction among the mothers than among the children (as seen by their mothers). The responsibility that they feel for organizing their children's daily life, whether self-claimed or brought into their consciousness through public opinion, includes for most mothers the task of arranging and maintaining a satisfactory contact for the children with their fathers. In case the father has totally disappeared from their children's lives or participates in it rather insignificantly (e.g. by way of the child's occasional day visits), other strategies are employed to take the place of a missing relationship. Mothers may include their children in their own personal networks and help them to launch their own familiarity as the strategy adopted by Sanna's mother. Alternatively mothers may, from the beginning, channel various other resources to the child and support his/her own initiatives in organizing her daily activities and relationships: children then are more partners with than dependents of their mothers. (An example of the result of the later strategy, in terms of the child's everyday life pattern, will follow later.) Such alternative strategies may be preferred by the mothers from the very beginning, and the data indicate that such mothers, more often than others, are satisfied with their present family arrangements and think generally that the one-parent family is a good, or at least a viable, family form.⁸ Those who think that the one-parent family form is a bad one (one third of the 25 mothers) tend to keep to themselves the main responsibility for organizing the child's daily life and not to

children either go alone to see their father or are taken there by their mother. Every third child (8) sees her father only on day visits.

IV. **No contact** at all between fathers and children. Four out of the 25 children were not seeing their fathers at all.

⁸ This assessment should not be taken to pertain to the "goodness" of the minimal mother-child unit alone, but to the larger arrangements in which the minimal unit is involved, such as the binuclear family arrangement or various versions of familiarity.

employ these partnership strategies. Their view of "good mothering" is that this can take place only in a "good family", and this is the conventional nuclear one. They nevertheless strive to follow this ideal of "good mothering" in their own post-divorce conditions, and often work hard to assure their children a proper family childhood and still carry feelings of dissatisfaction.⁹ Mothers express such feelings particularly in cases when the relationship of fathers to their children has remained at the most "lukewarm": fathers are available but they have provided few resources for children to use and to make the contact meaningful, or they have not functioned as co-parents. In other words, a satisfactory social space shared by fathers and children or by ex-spouses - familiarity - never emerged after divorce.

Pete, 11 years: self-organized and autonomous

The **child-organized, autonomous** pattern of everyday life may be taken as the other extreme to Suvi's kind of home-based and family-centred life pattern that is organized by the mother (sometimes with the co-operation of the father) within a social space bounded by the modern childhood institutions of family and school. Pete is one of them.

When Pete wakes up in the morning his mother is already away at her work. His mother is self-employed and works mostly in people's homes. She starts early and stops late because she wants to minimize the inconvenience that her presence means to the dwellers. She travels by car and now and then during the day takes short breaks to come home, take a nap or see that everything is fine. Before leaving in the morning she leaves the alarm clock to wake Pete up for school. Pete then makes his own breakfast - but sometimes doesn't - and looks through the morning paper before leaving for school.

School is fine for Pete: he likes the teachers and the children there. There isn't really anything in school that he dislikes. Children, however, are the best feature of school and

⁹ The most common contact patterns of the children of these eight mothers who think that the one-parent family is a bad family form is the binuclear family (5) and also the rest of them have some kind of contact with their fathers.

Pete has many friends among them. They play together during the breaks, walk back home together after school and see each other in their free time.

Mother may be at home when Pete comes back from school. If she isn't there, he makes himself a snack. Mother leaves 20-25 marks a day for him to go and buy for himself something to eat. Mostly he buys some ready-made food and eats it straight as it is.

Afternoons and evenings are fun: Pete meets a lot of friends - he mentions at least ten by name - and he plays with them out-of-doors, goes with them to their homes and meets their families. He may well stay there also for the evening meal. People in the neighbourhood know Pete and his mother well, because she has done things for many of them in their homes and has also helped many of them when dealing with the municipal offices and authorities. Pete thinks of some parents of his friends as also his friends and he visits these families particularly often. Neighbours may take Pete along with their own children to see games or movies or the swimming hall and never ask if he's got money to buy his ticket. (There is no shortage of money in the family: Pete's mother works hard but gets also the highest income in the sample.) Once in a while Pete baby-sits for a neighbouring family and recently went for a weekend trip with the little girl and her family to their summer cottage. When Pete's mother made a few days' trip abroad Pete stayed with another local family. Pete's mother: "He is very diplomatic and good with people, and has a lot of friends. He seems to look particularly for families with two parents and in a way makes the fathers his own as well! They then take him to places along with their own kids."

Weekends are not particularly different for Pete's mother: she often works even then but starts later. Pete is, of course, free from school, and may stay at home watching programmes on cable TV, go out with friends and or with their families, make trips with friends and their families or he may visit his father.

Pete's parents were divorced when he was a baby. Pete sees his father rarely, about three times a year, but from time to time his father rings him up and talks over the phone. Sometimes he comes around and drops tickets through the letter slit in the door for him and his friends to go to see a game. Father lives alone. He fetches Pete to his apartment on the other side of the town and returns him again as agreed with Pete's mother. Visits take place only after father rings Pete and suggests that they meet - Pete never bothers to call him. At father's home Pete watches TV and talks with him. He has no friends to play with at father's place, and "nothing much" happens. It is, however, quite OK there. Despite the infrequent visits father is - so Pete's mother thinks - a person of some significance to Pete.

Because of his mother's work load, Pete has had more extensive opportunities to use his time and explore his social environment than most of the children in the sample. His mother, too, has always left many resources for him to use. He has money

at his disposal to use according to his daily needs, but even more significant is the thorough acquaintance with the locality and its people that his mother has developed. When Pete was younger she used to take Pete along with her to the places where she was working and to the people whom she helped to sort out various official matters. Pete, of course, got to know practically "everyone living in the neighbourhood". As a result, an elaborated material and social exchange system has emerged between Pete and many people living in the suburban area. There is mutual giving and taking without much asking who pays, and Pete seems to cross freely the boundaries that usually mark the privacy of other children, adults and whole families. Everything has gone fine so far and Pete's mother feels very satisfied with the autonomy and activity her son displays in running things. She, too, has learned to know many people through Pete's acquaintances. On the other hand Pete's father, who lives in another suburb, has remained a complete outsider to this elaborate exchange system, and he has therefore hardly a possibility to be significant in his son's everyday life.

Pete may be exceptionally good in relating to his environment and he may have had an exceptional resource for developing this in his mother. But he is not the only child with this pattern. Because he spends most of his free time in his suburban living area where there is limited access to activities other than free play and to people that are not first and foremost mothers, fathers and children, his daily life seems to take a pronounced familial character, not quite unlike that of Sanna's. This, however, may derive more from his young age at the moment. Other children in this group, while one or two years older than Pete, display more clearly the fact that their life pattern is organized through essentially non-familial relationships and they have, more than Sanna and other children, moved into institutional arenas that are beyond the family, school and local child cultures. Jouni (12 years), for instance was originally led by his mother to take on his present interests in art and oriental sports. Since then he has developed them into favoured activities. They have, moreover, provided him with new and autonomously maintained relationships and even significant (adult) friendships that he does not share with his mother.

6. Contemporary childhoods

The short accounts of the everyday life of Suvi, Sanna and Pete presented above clearly support the claim that children actively construct their everyday life. They do this under different circumstances, with a variety of material, social and cultural resources at hand. Parents' divorce in itself implies a rearrangement of them and children's subsequent access to and actual use of various resources is anything but predictable from the mere fact of divorce. Thus living in a one-parent family does not entail a certain kind of childhood; there are many childhoods and children, too, participate significantly in their making.

People - and children among them - do not construct their daily lives freely out of the resources available to them. Children's choices, in particular, are constrained in many ways and opportunities to "choose" are socially structured. The psychological and pedagogical discourse of modern childhood, for instance, depicts the child as dependent and only slowly growing in the capacity to make reasonable choices. This takes effect also in the case of children living in one-parent families, e.g. through the restrictions set by knowing adults. Thus a child's age is a significant constraint in their daily activities. In the data, gender seems to correlate with age: the younger girls display more often than other children, a life pattern that takes place within a restricted familial space, whereas boys may have moved beyond these narrow boundaries earlier than girls and also more frequently in the older age categories.

The following scheme gives a range of elements out of which the variety of childhoods become constructed. In addition to age and gender, such elements include the living area and location of free-time activities (indoors - outdoors, homes - public facilities), the nature of children's personal network, the extent of their mobility between locations, the amount of money that is available for their own use and the significance of the father in the child's daily life.

Main
organizer
of child's
everyday
life

Child's everyday life in relation to mother's

Autonomous

Integrated

Mainly
mother

- youngest in age
- both girls and boys
- lives in both town centre and suburb
- freetime activities: outdoors & home
- many peer friends
- adult friends, mostly relatives
- mobile with adults
- access to some money for own use
- binuclear family arrangements prevails
- father's significance moderate to great

- youngest in age
- both girls and boys
- lives in suburb
- freetime activities: home
- few peer friends
- some adult friends, often mother's kin
- moves in locally based child culture
- none to some money for own use
- all contact patterns appear
- father's significance varies

Shared

- middle group in age
- mostly boys
- lives both in town centre and suburb
- active use of public spaces & facilities
- some peer friends
- adult friends are relatives
- mobile, independently as well as with adults
- access to some money for own use
- frequent contacts with father
- father's significance is moderate

- oldest group in age
- more boys than girls
- lives in suburb
- home life & local outdoor life (public)
- many peer friends
- adult friends are relatives
- mobile with peers, locally
- some to a lot of money for own use
- few contacts with father
- father's significance is moderate

Mainly
child

- oldest group in age
- mostly boys
- lives in town centre and suburb
- home, outdoor and public spaces
- some peer friends
- several adult friends, also outside kin
- independently mobile
- access to a lot of money
- some contacts with father
- father's significance is moderate

- middle group in age
- both boys and girls
- lives in town centre and suburb
- home life and locally outdoors
- few peer friends, mostly from school
- adult friends are few and relatives
- homebound
- access to no or some money
- day contacts (or less) with father
- father is fairly insignificant

The cross-tabulation of the two dimensions (autonomy - integration; main organizer) has proved useful as an analytical instrument for exploring the variation that exists in children's everyday lives. The six "boxes" as such should not be taken to present types of child life. However, by analyzing the patterns within each box one can arrive at the following tentative suggestions.

Two particular groups of children - the mother-organized autonomous group (the upper left corner in the scheme) and the self-organized integrated group (the

lower right corner) - display a pattern of daily life that more than that of the other groups corresponds to the "classical" idea of a childhood in which the family (here with a binuclear family structure or the minimal mother-and-child unit) provides the main frame of daily life. Other adult contacts are provided mainly by relatives and the main part of daily activities (besides school) takes place with peers that live in the neighbourhood and are often also school-mates. Joni, whose story was presented first, is one of them. Aino, mother of Pekka (11 years, mother-organized - autonomous) expresses strongly that it has been her intention to see that Pekka can live a "real childhood" despite the fact that his father moved away from them a few years ago. She puts great care in securing for Pekka all the things and experiences that she feels he is entitled to as long as he is a child. - This is the group of children living a **classical childhood** in the sense of Ariès: the parent-child relationship is the central organizing axis of their everyday lives and this has also continued in the post-divorce situation. Living in a one-parent household does not make any great difference to them personally, and children do not mention their family situation as anything particular. Their mothers have, moreover, made great efforts in order to secure that their children may live the kind of "normal", playful and carefree life that they think every child is entitled to because they are children. The troubles and consequences of divorce are for adults to bear.

The daily life of Tuuli (12 years) is self-organized and integrated with that of her mother's. The general frame of her life is the same as with Pekka: her mother even decided to quit her job as an employee in a large company and start her own business at home in order to be more close to her two daughters. They live in a neighbourhood with hardly any other children and meeting other people requires that Tuuli's mother takes her there by car. A few relatives to her mother - all adults or elderly - live in the town, and they regularly go to see them although not very often. His father lives far away and Tuuli sees him a few times a year when her mother decides to take the two daughters there. They never stay there overnight. - Tuuli is one of the children who

not only live in a minimal mother-child unit; she seems to live in an kind of extended dependency on her tiny family, with access to few resources. "Mostly we stay at home and do things together. We cook meals, and it it - eating is our common hobby!" the mildly plump girl tells during the interview. "And I tell my sorrows to the wind and the rain!" - Her mother's idea of proper childhood corresponds to the carefree classical family childhood type, and easier access to resources would probably help Tuuli and a few other children develop their everyday life more fully into such a type.

The co-organizing children, whether they live a fairly autonomous life or more integrated with that of their mothers, in turn make the group of **modern (sub)urban children**. Their most active sphere of life is with peers. Some of them - especially the more autonomous ones - actively explore public spaces and facilities, often in couples or larger groups of other children, and also make active use of club and other activities that are municipally organized and located in their living areas. Such resources are made available to children by the 'welfare state'. Their mothers are often outward active, social-minded women who kept worrying somewhat about their children while they themselves went to meetings and evening classes. Now that the children are older, they are no more worried over the absence of another adult in their child's family life. The peer-oriented children themselves worry even less.

Some of these "modern children" live in the town centre, whereas others, especially if their daily life is closely integrated with that of their mother's, live in suburbs and prefer to stay there, meeting lots of friends of their own age and moving about in groups, into homes and out again, perhaps listening to music in the local library or just strolling around the area, chatting. They draw a clear line between themselves as young people with their own activities and opinions, and adults. Living in a one-parent family is nothing particular as such. A problem related to this and mentioned by some of them is the shortage of money: being dependent on a typically low-income mother gives fewer opportunities to acquire the necessities of proper social life: music, instruments, travelling, rock festivals etc. Anu (13 years) feels herself, in

fact, outgrown from regularly meeting her father (who lives in the same town), but still calls him weekly and arranges for them to meet somewhere downtown. After a chat in a café or pizzeria financial transactions take place as Anu collects her weekly allowance from her father. That may be the father's practical significance for her at present, but for years exchange has also been going between them in the reverse direction. For some years Anu and her sister, when seeing their father at his apartment, used to shop and prepare meals together with him as well as make the place tidy. Lately they have done less of this kind of caretaking work for their father. Now Anu's habitual get-togethers with her father suffice for the more general "surveillance" of how things are with him.¹⁰

The last group of children might be named (familial) innovators. The group includes both mother-organized, integrated children (Sanna being one case) and self-organized, autonomous children (like Pete). The resources made available to children in this group to use and develop and use are partly different and so are the results in terms of everyday life pattern. These are similar in that they are organized in social relationships that reach beyond the familial ones.

Jenni (13 years), is one of the innovators. She has lived within her mother's "private" network of people and has developed the network and the resources within them into something of her own, just like Sanna has done (as described above). Now she operates some of the resources competently by herself. As a result she has travelled widely, feels herself competent in finding her way in strange places, talks easily with adults and eagerly visits jazz festivals or art exhibitions. Father and his new wife and baby are part of Jenni's private world: she maintains close contacts with his family despite considerable geographical distance and organizes her visits to his

¹⁰ The idea that children contribute to the life of adults by working for them runs against the dominant conception that children are the rightful recipients of such caretaking work by adults, and not its givers. As a consequence, the contributions that children, in fact, make, are ignored and, in any case, not seen for what they are in their own terms. In order to start seeing children's work they need to be treated as autonomous actors (Boulding 1980).

home without any interference from her mother, to their mutual satisfaction.

By exploiting the resources originally available to him through his mother, Pete has expanded the boundaries of his daily life beyond merely familial relationships around which Sanna's and Jenni's everyday worlds are organized. Pete and Jouni are among the children that ignore the rigid boundaries that are conventionally drawn around the world of the paradigmatic child optimally developing within a safe and protected family sphere; they now relate directly to the adult world. In this sense the everyday social worlds clearly reach beyond "the family" and even familiarity. They are, moreover, their very own worlds: different from their mothers' everyday social and familial worlds and, also, constructed through their own activities.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The sociological study of childhood is predicated on its being a historical and social phenomenon; it has a beginning and a history and both are intimately connected with the general dynamics of social life - childhood is not a world apart. Histories of childhood, moreover, indicate that since its 'invention', its locus has been within the modern construction of the (nuclear) family, which, in the separation of the 'private' and the 'public', was placed onto the former. Since then, childhood has been discursively constructed and reconstructed essentially as a position of dependency within the family. This has also defined the terms in which childhood has been addressed in sociology: as a family issue and as a pre-social condition. Both of these terms have assigned children and childhood to the margins of the discipline; this is also the legacy that prevails today.

As the theoretical separation of the family - the locus of modern childhood - from the public sphere reflected a 'real' separation of social life, social theory has reified the division (Nicholson 1986). Thereby sight has been lost of its historical contingency and the boundaries between the two spheres have been conceived of as rigid and unchanging. These reifications have been in turn built into sociology's 'classical' account of the family in which the modern (nuclear) family emerged with a clear gender and generational structure and equally clear boundaries that closed it from the outside, 'public' world and made it into an emotionally intense small group. A new kind of interest in and devotion to children developed; life within the family became centred around the child; the family functioned for society as the agent of socialization (Jamieson 1987).

Such is the present conceptual foundation of the scientific study of the child. The empirical (normative) basis of dominant (psychological-pedagogical) knowledge of

children's lives is a family childhood and, therefore, even the possibility that children would, already as children, participate significantly in the making of the world beyond the family (and its adjacent institutions) has not been raised. Sociology has operated with a historically limited notion of childhood.

This is now changing. The numerical and cultural normalization of families and households that are structurally different from the nuclear type is presently pluralizing sociology's notion of the family. Researchers, moreover, are discovering the societal and ideological origins of the 'classical' account and its reification of the family is being dissolved into a heterogeneous set of material, social and cultural relationships between genders and generations. The quasinatural and quasitimeless "family" evaporates and what remains at best families as the practical, social accomplishments of people in their everyday lives. Families appear to be assembled within larger economical, political, social and ideological processes; the boundaries between "family" and (the rest of) "society" are under constant recreation and redefinition. In this situation, childhood becomes problematic and the question is, what might be the children's place in contemporary social change and how it is going to evolve in the 'postmodern age'.

For sociology, this provides the 'child question'.

The present study has explored the 'child question' by way of learning from the lessons that the feminist movement and, within social science, academic feminism may teach as it has brought women back into science. The lessons have been identified as critique, analysis of gender, deconstruction of conventional theoretical knowledge and, finally, its reconstruction by researching and rethinking the social world from new (gendered) standpoints.

Such a course has been started; the new, interdisciplinary Childhood Studies is clearly motivated by dissatisfaction and criticism of existing childhood knowledge. Also, childhood is beginning to appear as a topic for sociologists to study. Children, moreover, form and are increasingly treated as a social category with specific relations

to other social categories and groups - a social 'class' with which various groups of more powerful 'others' maintain economical, political and cultural interests and social relations. These are now becoming visible; childhood has stopped being just a private family affair. Finally, as the next step in this logic, the subjectivity and agency of children comes into vision.

The present study has explored each of these developments as they appear in sociological literature and empirically by looking at the organization of everyday life in the case of twenty-five children who live in one-parent households. The empirical exploration is conducted from a children's perspective, or standpoint, which aims to reveal the both active and constructive roles that children have in the making of their own everyday lives. Despite arguments that the position of children has been (in the Western world) radically individualized, children are still dependent on their families for resources with which they go about constructing their daily lives. Different sets of material, social and cultural resources are available and children, moreover, use them in different ways.

Three different everyday life patterns, or childhoods, were found in the study: A 'classical' childhood that is an extension of the modern childhood phenomenon (Ariès) in children's post-divorce situation; a modern (sub)urban childhood that is predicated on the development of a child and youth market and an apparatus of social and cultural services for children and youth; and an innovative childhood that may be seen as an extension of the child's familial relations beyond the conventional boundaries of the nuclear family ('familiality').

Psychologists may want to evaluate such childhoods in terms of children's (and possibly their mothers') individual and social development and child welfare experts in terms of social risks that might rise from the 'unconventional' family life of some of the children. For sociologists, the childhoods that emerge from such a study bring to light the choices that children may make in terms of standpoints to knowledge. Such research, hopefully, also begins to show the many levels and the complexity in

children's experience of the childhood phenomenon and to validate the methodological significance of a children's standpoint in researching that experience.

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Research reports

The aim of the study is to develop concepts by which childhood may be understood as a modern social phenomenon. For this, the feminist strategy of theorizing the 'woman question' is taken as a methodological guide and the growing pool of childhood research is used as a resource for developing a sociological concept of childhood. The results of the methodological and conceptual exploration are tried out with data on childhood experiences in one-parent families.

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